THE VEE-BOERS

MAYNE·REID

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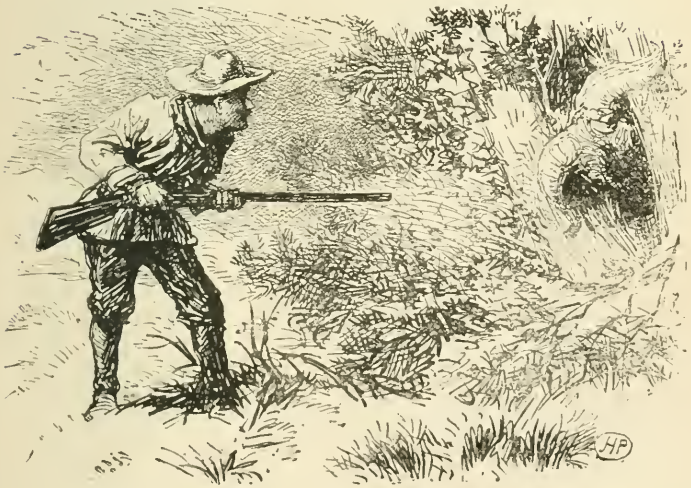
THE VEE BOERS.—p. 3

THE VEE-BOERS

A TALE OF ADVENTURE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID

Author of "The Headless Horseman," "Rifle Rangers," etc., etc., etc.



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THE VEE-BOERS:

A TALE OF ADVENTURE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE KAROO.

A VAST plain, seemingly bounded but by the horizon; treeless, save where a solitary *cameel doorn** spreads its feathered leaves, or a clump of arborescent aloes, mingled with rigid-stemmed euphorbias, breaks the continuity of its outline. These types of desert vegetation but proclaim its sterility, which is further evinced by tufts

* The "cameel-doorn," literally, camel-thorn, is a species of acacia, whose tender shoots and leaves are the favourite food of the cameleopard, or giraffe. It is a common and characteristic tree in most districts of southern Africa, having pinnate leaves, and, like most of the acacia tribe, bright yellow blossoms.

of whiteish withered grass, growing thinly between them.

Over it three waggons are moving; immense vehicles with bodies above four yards in length, surrounded by an arching of bamboo canes covered with canvas. To each is attached eight pairs of long-horned oxen, with a driver seated on the box, who flourishes a whip, in length like a fishing-rod; another on foot alongside, wielding the terrible *jambok*, while at the head of the extended team marches the "foreloper," *reim* in hand, guiding the oxen along the track.

Half a score horsemen ride here and there upon the flanks, with three others in advance; and bringing up the rear is a drove of milch cows—some with calves at the foot—and a flock of *fat-tailed* sheep, their tails full fifty pounds in weight, and trailing on the ground.

The cows and sheep are in charge of ten or a dozen dark-skinned herdsmen, most of them all but naked; while a like number of large wolfish-looking dogs completes the list of living things visible

outside the waggons. But, were the end curtains raised, under their tilts would be seen women with children—of both sexes and all ages—in each the members of a single family, its male head excepted.

Of the last there are three, corresponding to the number of the waggons, of which they are the respective proprietors—the three men riding in advance. Their names, Jan Van Dorn, Hans Blom, and Klaas Rynwald. All Dutch names, and Dutch are they who bear them, at least by descent, for the scene is Southern Africa, and they are *Boers*.

Not of the ordinary class, though, as may be told by their large accompaniment of unattached cattle and sheep—over a hundred of the former, and three times as many of the latter. These, with other signs well known to South Africans, proclaim them to be VEE-BOERS.*

* "Vee-boers" are distinguished from other Boers by their special employment being the grazing and raising of cattle. To this they devote themselves exclusively, as the *stockmen* of Australia, and the *ranchmen* of Western America. They

They are far away from any settlement of civilized or white men, the nearest being their own frontier town, Zoutpansberg, in the Transvaal, from which they are distant full three hundred miles northward. Nor are they in Transvaalian territory, but that of the Tebelé, beyond the Limpopo river, and journeying on north.

Why they are there calls for explanation, and a word will suffice. The world has of late heard much of the Transvaal Republic and its brave people; how distasteful to them was annexation to the English Government; indeed, so repugnant, that many plucked up the rooftrees they had but lately planted, and were off again, scarce thinking or caring whither, so long as they got beyond the reach of British rule.

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have no fixed habitation, flitting about from place to place with their flocks wherever the pasture tempts them, and making house and home of their huge *trek-waggons*, just as the "cheap jacks" of England. They have tents also, and sometimes erect rude huts.

It is on record—a painful one—that many of those political fugitives passed through hardships scarce conceivable, and not a few perished by the way—miserably perished, the victims of fatigue, hunger, and thirst. And it is of just such a party we purpose giving account of, their journeyings, adventures, and dangers, by flood and by field.

* * * * *

The time was just after the annexation, and our Vee-Boers, as introduced to the reader, were weeks away from their abandoned homes in the Transvaal.

That they had permission to enter the territory of the Tebelé, might be taken for granted, otherwise they would have been on dangerous ground. For its powerful and despotic chief was not the man to allow intrusion into his dominions, even by peaceful travellers.

But they had his leave, backed by invitation, not only to pass through, but make permanent home in them, if they wished. Jan Van Dorn, the

"*baas*"* of the migrating party, an old *jager*, had, in bygone days, hunted all over the Tebelé country, smoked the pipe of peace with Moselekatse himself, and so established a friendship still existing. In one of his expeditions he had discovered a magnificent grazing country—a very paradise for the Vee-Boer—and it was for this they were now making.

They were journeying by night, or rather early morning, before daybreak. It was not their habit to lie late; but just then they had more than one reason for being up betimes and moving. It was in the Torrid Zone, where travelling by day is oft a very torture, especially over a plain such as that they were crossing.

They had entered upon a track of *karoo*,† which

* "Baas," master. It is synonymous with the "boss" of the Southern United States, which, no doubt, was carried thither by the slave negroes who had had dealings with the Dutch of South Africa.

† The "karoos" of Southern Africa may be compared with our moorlands, only more extended in area, and with a different sort of vegetation. Heaths of many beautiful species are among their characteristic plants, as all may know who take a pride in the keeping of hothouses.

they knew to extend for more than 100 miles; treeless, shadeless, and without water, save here and there in pools, or natural cisterns, at long distances apart. Besides, no rain had fallen on it for months, and like as not the water reservoirs would all be dried up. Not strange, then, their travelling by night, as by day; for it was life or death to them to get across the karoo.

Luckily they were favoured by moonlight, with stars in a clear, unclouded sky, which insured them against straying from the practicable route. And as their guide, a Hottentot, by name Smutz knew every inch of it, they had confidence in his piloting.

So on they moved, noiselessly, save when now and then crack of whip, the sharp snap of a *jambok*, or the ejaculations of the men wielding this formidable instrument of animal torture,* disturbed

* The "jambok," or "schambok," is an elastic whip, all stock and no lash, or if you like, *vice versâ*. Some six feet long, it tapers from a butt of about an inch in diameter to the tiniest tip; and, when forcibly laid on, will make *weals*

the stillness of the night. More rarely was it broken by the rumble of wheels, these for the most part being fellies deep in soft, yielding sand.

on the skin of a horse, and cut that of a man clean through. It is a cruel instrument of torture, and, I regret to say, not exclusively employed to punish animals, as the natives of South Africa too well know. To threaten a disobedient servant with the jambok—be he Hottentot, Fingo, or Caffre—is to bring him back to kneeling obeisance. The best jamboks are made of hippopotamus hide.

CHAPTER II.

A WEIRD SPECTACLE.

GOING at a slow crawl in profound silence, the huge vehicles, with their dark bodies and white tilts, the long serried line of yoked oxen extended in advance of them, would have presented a strange mystifying spectacle to one not knowing what it was. Weird and ghostlike under the silvery light of the moon, a native of the country, where such had never been seen before, viewing it from a distance, might have imagined it some monster of a world unknown.

But before morning came, the travellers were themselves witnesses of a spectacle common enough in that same district, yet, in seeming, quite as strange and mysterious as that of the waggon train.

Proceeding in the opposite direction, and at no great distance off, appeared a number of dark forms, one following the other in single file. Immense creatures they were; each nearly as large

They let the herd pass by.

as any of the waggons, but, unlike these, living and breathing. For they were elephants—a troop on the march—nigh threescore in number, their line extending for hundreds and hundreds of yards

across the karoo. They were passing on silent as spectres, the tread of the ponderous pachyderm being noiseless as that of a cat. Even on stony ground it is scarce distinguishable at the shortest distance, and on that sand-bestrewed plain it made not the slightest sound to betray their presence.

Adding to their spectral appearance were the long, withered grass-tufts and karoo bushes, white as if coated with hoar frost. These concealing their stride, they seemed to glide along as boats upon water, propelled by some invisible agency, acting underneath.

To the Vee-Boers, as much hunters as herdsmen, it was a tempting, tantalizing sight, and under other circumstances the silence of the night would have been broken by the cracking of shots. But they knew that to attack the elephants might infuriate and bring them in charge upon the waggon-train; which would surely be its destruction.* So

* Elephants often march in single file—indeed, it is their common way—the sagacity of these animals telling them they are thus less exposed to danger. Often, too, a party

they resisted the temptation, and let the herd pass on; the two parties, silent and weird-like as ever, gradually widening the space between, till at length they were beyond sight of one another.

Soon after daylight declared itself; but it brought no rest to the now wearied wayfarers—not even when the sun had risen high above the horizon. For they had failed to come across any water, and halting without that were worse than keeping on. Already suffering from thirst, it would but prolong their suffering to make stop or stay.

Several of the so-called cisterns, or natural tanks, had been passed, and as many pools, but all were dry, or with only just enough moisture to keep the mud in their bottoms. Remaining by these would be rest neither to them nor the animals, now needing water as much or more than themselves.

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of hunters, especially Vee-Boers, well acquainted with the habits of the great pachyderms, will allow them to pass unmolested, to be pursued and attacked farther on. A charge of infuriated elephants on a camp might result in its wholesale destruction.

Another element also contributed to their torture —heat. As the sun mounted higher in the firmament, this became excessive; so sultry that men and animals were perspiring at every pore; while on the ground, hot as the floor of a baker's oven, it was painful to set foot.

The shoeless natives — Hottentots and Caffres alike—suffered especially, notwithstanding the soles of their feet being callous, and hard as horn. Some were seen to adopt a singular plan for keeping them cool—by a plaster of mud, taken from the waterless but still moist pools, applying it poultice-fashion, and at intervals damping them with the juice of the euphorbia, and other succulent plants.

Equally odd, and more amusing, was the behaviour of the dogs. They would make a rush ahead of the waggons; dive under a bush, tussock of grass, or anything giving shade; and there lie panting till the train got past. Then, rising reluctantly, they would stand for a time contemplating the heated surface of sand, afraid to set paw upon it; whine piteously; and finally, with a plunge, start off

afresh, dash past the waggons, and repeat the performance as before.

Thus on over the sun-parched plain moved the party of migrant Boers; but not now silent as in the night. What with oxen bellowing, cows lowing in response to their bawling calves, sheep bleating, and dogs howling, there was noise enough, and a surfeit of it.

And mingling with these cries of distress, at intervals came the crack of a whip, loud as the report of a pistol, and the shouts of the drivers urging their oxen on.

As if to add to their difficulty, they had entered upon a tract thickly overgrown with *waaght-een-beetje*;* while those of them who were on foot, had their ankles lacerated by the *grapple-plant*.†

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* "Waaght-een-beetje" is the Dutch synonym for "Wait-a-bit." The tree or bush, so quaintly designated, is another of the many species of South African acacias having spines sharp as fish-hooks and so set as to hold on whatever they have caught, requiring skill, with an expenditure of time, to get clear of them. It is the *acacia detinens* of the botanists.

† The "Grapple-plant" (uncaria procumbens) is a creeper,

Retarded by these various obstructions, they made but slow progress; less than three miles an hour—the orthodox rate of speed made by South African travellers "on trek;" and it had come to be a struggle painful as it was perilous. Fearfully dispiriting too; since they knew not when or how it was to end. Their sole hope rested on a large pond or lake their guide told them of, and which he had never known to go dry. But it was still over ten miles distant, which meant at least four hours of time—an appalling prospect in their then condition; men, horses, and oxen, all athirst, all tottering in their steps. There was no help for it, no alternative, but keep on; and on they kept.

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with beautiful purple blossoms and a fruit beset with hooked spines that readily catch on to the clothes, or even the skin. It is very troublesome to the barefooted natives who may have occasion to pass over ground where it grows.

CHAPTER III.

A BATTUE OF LIONS.

IT was well on in the afternoon when the travellers perceived a dark belt rising above the plain at a long distance off, but directly on their line of march. A glad sight to their eyes, as they could tell it to be timber, and knew they would there find the *vley*,* of which their guide had fore-warned them. The prospect of water, shade, and rest, all at the same time, and all so much needed, inspired them to renewed speed; and the ponderous waggons seemed to move more lightly along, while their conductors were merrier —drivers, after jambok men, and forelopers. Even

* "Vley." The synonym in Dutch for a lake of limited extent—a pond, or pool.

the dumb animals, becoming infected with the same spirit, partook of the general rejoicing, as though they also knew that relief was near.

Yet was it far off as ever. The promise that cheered them was not to be fulfilled. On reaching the timber at the point where the vley was, or should have been, they found this too dried up, as all the others. In its bed were only pebbles and white sand, from which were reflected the rays of the setting sun, as from a sheet of frosted snow! So much for their hopes of water; and as for shade, the trees proved to be *mopanes*,* whose leaves grow vertically on the branches, and, like the eucalypti of Australia, afford no more protection from the sun than would a network of wire!

Nor was this the worst. Scarce had they come

* The "mopane" is a tree belonging to the family of "banhinias," with pinnate leaves set point upwards, so that the sun glints down between, and scarce any shade is given by the tree, even when in full foliage.

to a stop by the wood's edge, when they heard issuing out of it a noise well known both to themselves and their animals, and by both equally dreaded. For it was the roar of the lion; not one lion, but more like a score of them, roaring together, as if each was doing its best to outroar all the rest. The place appeared to be infested with the formidable brutes—a very lair of them; and the fearful fracas they were making caused horses, oxen, cows—in short, every four-footed creature in the train to dance affrightedly about as though no longer feeling fatigue. To ordinary travellers the noise, with its attendant dangers, would have been appalling; and even among them there was momentary alarm. But they were Boers of the Transvaal, of courage proverbial and historic; still more, Vee-Boers, who are as much hunters as graziers, and little regard to the lion's roar. It was only because of there being such a chorus of it, that they were for a time taken back.

Soon recovering themselves, however, there was a general rush towards the waggons, in which they

habitually kept their *roers*;* when, each armed himself with one of these long guns, front was made to the foe, still giving tongue, though as yet unseen.

Not for long were the lions chary about putting in an appearance. Soon their tawny skins were seen glistening among the trunks of the mopanes, zigzagging from point to point, and at each slant drawing nigher to the spot where the waggons had drawn up.

It was now seen that there were quite twenty of them, or more; while the intonation of their cries —full of fury and menace—told of the intended attack. Had they made it on the moment, and simultaneously, it would have been all up with the travellers—at the very least would there have been wholesale destruction among their animals.

But, luckily for them, the lion does not always attack on the instant; more often making approach

* "Roer." The sort of gun in common use among the South African Dutch. It is a single barrel of great length and carry far.

progressively, and with the caution of the common cat, as most others of the *felidæ*. Probably had the prey they contemplated springing on been a party of naked natives, with no other defence than their skin shields, the *leeuws** would have acted differently. But seeing before them that strange array—the waggons with their white tilts, a spectacle in all likelihood new to them—it was but natural they should feel shy about beginning the assault. It could not be actual fear, a feeling unknown to the African lion, in those districts where it is unaccustomed to meet the white man, with his death-dealing weapons; more like was it mystification at sight of the huge vehicles larger than elephants, and which, for all the lions knew, might be also living things, and far more dangerous.

Whether from this, or whatever cause, the great felines hesitated to make approach, though gradually drawing nigher, as the confidence became

* "Leeuw." The Boers' name for the "king of beasts."

strengthened by their receiving no hurt from the singular monsters that had intruded upon their domain.

This up to a certain moment; then they were saluted by a sound louder than that they were themselves making, as the Vee-Boers poured a volley upon them, which silenced half their number, by dropping them dead in their tracks.

The rest did not retreat, but stood their ground, to all appearance more mystified than ever. They had heard thunder, and seen lightning, but never with an accompaniment of smoke, such as they now saw, wondering what it all meant. And while still unresolved, and hesitating how to act, the thick blue mist, which for a while had screened them, drifted aside, to be replaced by another and similar screen as the reloaded *roers* blazed forth again.

After the second volley, only two or three live lions remained upon the ground; these seeming wounded, as they went limping off among the mopanes.

For the Vee-Boers it was a victory easier than

they had anticipated ; and over Royalty itself—a *battue* of grandest game, the kings of beasts.

On gathering up the slain, they found fifteen of the *leeuws,* young and old, male and female, six being lions, the rest lionesses.

The reason for so many having congregated there was the drought. Up till a late period there had been water in the vley, making it a rendezvous for buffaloes, antelopes, and other ruminants ; many skeletons of which lay around, with bones clean picked—the work of these same lions, and other carnivora. But in time instinct had directed the cud-chewing animals to repair to other places, where the water was of surer supply ; while the predatory species, more able to bear thirst, and hunger too, had stayed behind. Hence such a number found crowding together; and their having been for some time without food—indeed, half-famished, as it proved on examination of their carcases—will account for their uniting to attack the travellers—an attempt so cleverly and completely foiled.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TULP.

MEANWHILE the waggons had been left standing just as they drew up, the oxen still under yoke. And now came the question, whether to "outspann,"* or not.

It was but of short debate, however, as all were convinced of the uselessness of remaining there. Indeed more than useless; since they would only be wasting time; and, thirsting as they were, that meant everything. Besides, their guide knew of another vley some miles farther on, where he had still better hopes of finding water—now their greatest want. The heat no longer discomforted

* "Outspann." The word has a general meaning, and refers not only to detaching the animals from the vehicles, but making halt either temporarily or for the night.

them, as the sun had got low, and the atmosphere become as cool as they cared for. They might expect moonlight, too, as on the night before, which would also be in their favour. So, tired though they were, it was determined to trek on.

While this resolve was being arrived at, an incident occurred which was calculated to make them thankful they had not already outspanned. Indeed, as they soon after came to know, it was rather a fortunate circumstance their finding the vley dried up. Had there been water in it, they would surely have stayed there all night, to discover next morning that their horses and oxen would not be worth taking farther—even unable to take themselves. Their milch kine would also have been sacrificed, as in reality were their sheep, to the last hoof. Luckily all but the sheep escaped, though with the driven cattle, milk cows, and their calves, it was the closest of shaves. In that grove—for it was a wood of only a few score acres in extent—there was a something even more dangerous than lions, at least to grass-eating animals. A plant it

was which grew under the mopanes, green as a leek, and not unlike one in its leafage, covering the ground thickly, as onions in a garden bed. The Vee-Boers knew the plant well—too well—and, but for their attention being absorbed by the encounter with the lions, would long before have observed it. As it was, they only became aware of its presence on seeing their sheep—that had been left for a time to themselves—greedily browsing upon it. The *lanigers* were hungry as wolves, and would have eaten anything green that chanced in their way; so the whole flock, as soon as getting up to the wood's edge, had rushed in among the trees, open-mouthed at what seemed a tempting morsel.

It was the *baas* of the travelling party—Jan Van Dorn himself—who first perceived the danger, and sounded the alarm, crying out,——

"Oh, brothers! We've lost our sheep! See what they're feeding on; it's the *tulp!*"*

* "Tulp." The Dutch name for "tulip," of which it is but an abbreviated form. The plant itself is so called from its resemblance to the tulip, both in leaf and flower. It is of the iris family, and the genus *morœa*.

They thus addressed, needed no further explan-

ation of a word which to the reader may be unintelligible. For there was not a man of them

but knew what the *tulp* was, and its poisonous nature—possibly not one whose herds and flocks had not some time or other been decimated by it.

Soon as it was seen how things stood, there was a rush in among the mopanes, a surrounding of the sheep, and a chorus of shouts, as they were driven out again to open ground. But all too late, as every one seemed to be aware; and when at length the forward movement was about being resumed, it became a subject of discussion whether it would be worth while taking these animals along.

Still there was a hope that, however faint, some of them might survive, and leaning upon this, along were they taken; their owners making all haste to depart from a spot alike dangerous in its *flora* as its *fauna*.

Once more was there a cracking of whips, and the oxen, straightening out along the *trek-touw*,* moved reluctantly on.

* "Trek-touw." The long cable-like rope of raw hide continuing the "tongue," or pole, of the waggons, and to which

And now the moon, as had been anticipated, giving a bright light, the travellers made good way; before midnight arriving at the second vley, where fortunately there was still a *soupçon* of water. It was not visible above the surface of sand that formed the vley's bed; but on examination, several cavities were discovered in which appeared the much wished-for element, that had been hollowed out by the hoofs of quaggas and zebras. Writers talk of instinct teaching these animals to dig their own drinking wells; but the teaching in reality comes from a process of reasoning-intelligence, as that of man himself. All naturalists know that, as indeed ought every one who owns dog or cat, and has observed either spring up to a door-handle, making attempt with manifest design to draw the door open.

Now, thirsting like sponges, the travellers outspanned, and speedily. All hands that could be

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the forward pairs of oxen are attached. They are also made fast to it at night, when there is any fear of their straying from the camp.

spared from looking after the cattle set about sinking a pit in the sand; into which, soon came water enough for all their needs.

It required caution, however, with much shouting, and wielding of jamboks, to keep the animals out of it. The scent of the water had reached their nostrils, an attraction irresistible, and horses neighed, yoke-oxen bellowed, cows groaned in chorus with their bawling calves, all madly eager to wet their muzzles, and quench their thirst that had so long tortured them.

But the Vee-Boers, accustomed to such display, knew the precautions to be taken; so kept the impatient creatures under restraint and aloof, at length giving them to drink, from the "rush-buckets,"* which were part of their *impedimenta*.

* The "milk-baskets" of the Caffres are frequently in use among the Vee-Boers, when on trek, their lightness making them more convenient than vessels of a heavier kind. They are made of the stems of a species of "cyperus," a rush allied to the "Paper-reed," sewed so closely together that when dry they will hold water. The Caffres use them as milk pails, and, when emptied, their dogs are allowed to lick them clean. The

Their own thirst satisfied, then that of their stock, supper was eaten heartily, and they retired to rest and sleep. Not all, however; nearly a third of their number remaining awake, and on the alert, as guards of the camp. They had no fear of their animals wandering away, fatigued as these were. Even had it been otherwise, and ever so fresh, their straying would have been little apprehended. For *on trek*, horses and cattle—in short all domesticated quadrupeds—regard the great waggons as they would the houses of a homestead, and will return to them just the same. Instinct—or, from what has been said above, rather reason—admonishes them that beside these is their best place, safest from the attack of predatory beasts—above all, from the lion, the real *bete-noir* of South African cattle.

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cleaning is still further carried out by an insect—a species of cockroach *(Blatta)*, which eats what remains of the milk from the interstices between the rushes. So important are these roaches regarded for this purpose, that a Caffre on erecting a new hut, will take his milk-baskets into an old one, and, as soon as a sufficient number of the insects have entered them, will carry the vessels back to where their services are required.

Those of our travelling party had been sufficiently frightened at their last halting-place, to keep them cowed, and tame, for at least twenty-four hours after; and just so were they, starting and trembling at every cry of wild creature that reached their ears —even at that of the cowardly hyæna.

And here they heard lions too, though none came near. At this vley, still affording enough water to attract fat quaggas, zebras, and gemsboks, the tawny monsters needed not whetting their teeth on tame cattle, lean and tough as those of the Vee-Boers had got to be.

So the night passed by without further disturbance or adventure; day broke again; breakfast was eaten; the oxen inyoked; and the journey over the *karoo* continued.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE MOWANA.

THREE waggons drawn up under the shade of a gigantic *mowana**—the waggons of the Vee-Boers after their long, toilsome, and perilous journey across the *karoo*. They are again outspanned, but now in *laager*, which tells of an intention to remain there for some little time. The vehicles are set in such fashion as to enclose a rectangular space, open at one end; while around them, at some distance off, a circular fence of thorny bushes roughly form a *chevaux-de-frise*, to hinder lions, hyænas, and other marauders from approaching too near. Seemingly, the ground has been judiciously

* "Mowana" is the South African synonym for the "baobab" (*Adansonia digitata*).

UNDER THE MOWANA.—p. 32

chosen, with an eye to the three chief requisites of a camp—grass, wood, and water. It is contiguous to the bank of a clear, running stream, on each side fringed with a belt of timber, trees of many different kinds; while landward, far as eye can reach, extends an open *veldt*,* grass-covered, and affording plenteous pasturage for their cattle. These are all now on it; oxen and milch-kine; the horses, too, hoppled neck-and-knee, to keep them from straying. But just now there is little fear of that, the animals not yet having recovered from the Karoo journey, and all are browsing tranquilly.

The sheep are not there—not one of them. If looked for, they would be found—or rather their carcases—lying here and there along the line of yesterday's trek; though, like as not, even the carcases would not be there, only the skins and bones; the flesh long since devoured by jackals, hyenas, and vultures.

* "Veldt" is a tract of grassy plain or prairie. It is in part synonymous with our word "field," which we have changed from its ancient form, and partly from its signification.

In addition to wood, water, and grass, the camp-ground enjoys another convenience—in tropical Africa, nearly as essential as any of the three—shade. The *mowana*,* with its wide extending arms, and thickly set foliage, casts shadow over a circle of full fifty yards diameter, and underneath it there is room for everybody and everything.

The hour is ten o'clock in the morning; the travellers having arrived there in the afternoon of the preceding day. That they have not been idle since can be told by the work done. The laager-fence itself must have cost time and labour in its construction; while inside it are other evidences of industry. Much of the lading of the waggons is out, and on the ground, to be re-packed and re-

* As all know, the mowana, or baobab, is one of the largest of trees; specimens being met with having a girth of nearly 100 feet. It is not proportionately tall, however—nothing like the *sequoias* of California. Its leaves dried and pulverized are used as an antidote to various diseases, as diarrhœa, fevers, &c. Its fruit is slightly acid, but well-flavoured, and is eaten by the natives of tropical Africa. The mowana is essentially a tree of the tropics.

arranged for further transport; while upon lines, stretched from tree to tree, hang all sorts of *lingerie* in the process of drying; proof that the washer-women of the party had been up and stirring betimes.

And this work, with many other kinds, is still in progress; not only the women and girls, but the men and boys being actively engaged one way or another. Some of the older hands are repairing saddles, bridles, and harness-gear; others mend *vel-schœnen*;* and still others look to the waggon-wheels, whose spokes and fellies, contracted by the drought, have been for some time threatening to part company. A lapping of wet raw hide, when it dries, will bind, and hold them together, firm as any clasp or screw of iron; this every South African traveller knows, and none better than a Vee-Boer.

* "Vel-Schœnen." Literally "skin shoes." They are made of untanned hide and sewed with thongs of the same. They are worn by many Boers, though it is their Hottentot servants who make and mend them. One of these yellow-skinned cobblers will make a pair of Vel-Schœnen in less than a couple of hours.

Some of the women are occupied with their needles, which they ply with a skill not excelled by the most accomplished Parisian *coturière;* others milk the cows, led inside the laager for this purpose, while yet others are engaged in preparing the *morgen maal.** It is being cooked on a kitchen-range, of quaint, primitive kind, such as may be met with only in Southern Africa. Hand of man has had nought to do with its manufacture, nor has there been any iron employed in it. Instead, it is an earthen structure; part mud, and part a gummy, glutinous substance secreted by insects, these having been its constructors. For the cooking-stove in question, is neither more nor less than an ant-hill, the home of a hive of *termites*,† of which there

* The "morgen-maal" (morning meal) of the Cape Dutch is a more substantial repast than an ordinary English breakfast, being quite as much a dinner. The hour for eating it is about eleven a.m.; but there is usually an earlier *déjeûner*, consisting of a cup of coffee, and a slice of bread, or cake.

† The "termites," or white ants as more commonly called, often make their "hills" as large as good-sized hay cocks, to which they bear a streng resemblance. It is quite a common thing for *Trek* or *Vee* Boers to utilize them as above described.

are several near. For some reason or other abandoned by its builders, it has been easily transformed to the use now made of it. On the night before, a number of cavities had been hollowed out around its base, fires kindled therein, and tires of shelves cut into the sides above them. Now, at 10 a.m., the whole mass is at furnace heat, kettles boiling, stewpots simmering, and frying-pans hissing —in short, a complete *batterie de cuisine* in stridulous activity.

One unaccustomed to Transvaalian cookery might not greatly relish the viands in preparation ; the meat part of them being mostly antelope flesh, fried in lard rendered from the tails of the fat-tailed sheep. None of it, however, came from those lately poisoned by the tulp, the travellers having previously laid in a supply, sufficient to last them to the end of their contemplated journey. For the lard in question is a staple commodity among the Dutch colonists of South Africa, kept in stock not only in their houses, but carried with them in their waggons when on trek. It is often used as a sub-

stitute for butter, and however distasteful to the palate of strangers, by the Boers it is regarded of first *goût.*

And now the savoury steam, exhaling from the pots and pans, fills the air with a fragrance more agreeable to the nostrils of the travellers than all the odours of Araby. So appetizing is it, that all are madly impatient to partake of the *morgen-maal.*

This they do as soon as culinary operations are ended, coffee being an accompaniment to the more substantial dishes. After which the white men of the party indulge in a "soupie" of *brandeywyn** winding up with a smoke; when all return to the tasks of the day. The children alone remain idle at play; some of the most courageous boys climbing up among the branches of the mowana, for the tempting fruit seen there. But the work of none is now of long continuance, only up till about twelve

* "Brandeywyn." A liquor of the brandy or whisky specialty, distilled from peaches. It is the common tipple in use among the Dutch colonists of the Cape, and other parts of South Africa.

noon. Then it is necessarily suspended on account of the sultry heat, and all congregate under the mowana; the animals seeking shade beneath other umbrageous trees that stand by the side of their pasture ground.

CHAPTER VI.

A RUSH OF BUFFALOES.

IT had come to be late in the afternoon, with a cooler atmosphere as the sun sank towards the horizon; but as most of the necessary jobs had been done in the morning, there was no resumption of work. Milking the cows, and feeding the calves, were the only tasks that now occupied the people of the laager, and these were entrusted to the Caffre attendants, well up in all matters relating to cow-kine and the dairy. Indeed, all the different tribes of this race, whether of Kaffirland proper, or the more northerly Zululand, look upon cattle as their chief source of wealth and subsistence.

Some of the women had set about the evening meal; when the younger men—nearly all sons, nephews, or other relatives of Van Dorn, Blom, and

Rynwald—bethought them of spending an hour or so in shooting at a target, the sport of their preference, and encouraged by the elders. For by a people, part of whose food is obtained through the chase, and whose every-day life exposes them to its perils, being a good marksman is naturally held in high estimation.

Getting hold of their guns, therefore, the young Boers proceeded to the open veldt; and, after making up a match, commenced practice, the shell of an ostrich's egg serving them for mark. This most of them could hit at 100 paces distance, four times out of six; and at 200 would not often miss it. Their long roers carried still farther, and an ordinary-sized antelope, even at 300, would have stood but little chance with them.

And now there was keen competition between these young marksmen, with a desire to excel, quite as much as among our crack-shots at Wimbledon. But they had not been long thus occupied, when their ears were saluted by a sound, admonishing them they might soon expect something to shoot

at very different from an egg-shell. From afar, over the plain, came a noise like the rumbling of distant thunder, growing louder as they listened; at length to be recognized as the quick trample of buffaloes —a herd of them "on the run." And that they were running in the direction of the laager could be told by the continually increasing sound. But soon there was no doubt of it; the animals themselves being seen, as they came crashing through a tract of bush on the farther side of the veldt, and bounding on over the open. An immense herd it was, blackening the green sward to the width of a hundred yards, and thick as sheep in a flock.

To the amateur British Nimrod in South Africa the sight of such big game, and in such plenty, would have imparted pleasure instead of begetting fear. And in the same light the young Boers would have regarded it, but for a circumstance that presented the spectacle in an altogether different aspect —one of danger. Alongside the great tree, under which their camp was placed, ran an open list leading down to the river, and, in all probability, the

buffaloes would pass that way, making for the water. Indeed, they were heading straight for it; though drink might not be their object. Their maddened bounds and loud bellowing, as they came thundering on, seemed to betoken some other cause of excitement than thirst. However that might be, it soon became evident they meant to pass under the mowana, right through the laager. The enclosing fence of thorns would be no obstruction to them, any more than if it were of reeds or straw; and woe to all who should chance to be in their way! Tornado or cyclone would not be more destructive.

By this every one in the camp, and every living creature around it, had become aware of the threatening peril. Men shouted, women shrieked, the children screaming in chorus; while the horses neighed affrightedly, dancing about in their hopples; the cattle lowed and routed; and the dogs ran to and fro, some barking, some angrily growling. In short, the place lately so tranquil, most of its occupants indulging in the *dolce-far-niente*, was suddenly transformed into what seemed a Pandemonium.

Meanwhile, the young marksmen out in the open had not been idle. If taken by surprise, they felt no dismay, nor aught rendering them powerless to act. Instead, soon as convinced that the buffaloes were bent for passing under the mowana, one and all made a rush towards their horses, calling out to those in the camp to bring saddles and bridles. They knew that the likeliest way to stem the advancing torrent was to present front to it on horseback; and there might be time, as the foremost of the buffaloes were still nearly a mile off. It would be quick work; but luckily the hoppled horses were easily and quickly caught, and in a trice bridled and saddled. Then, each mounting his own—the whole party numbering nigh a dozen—they galloped out upon the veldt to meet the advancing enemy. Scarce another minute elapsed before their horses' heads were within less than 300 yards from those of the foremost buffaloes; there for an instant to be drawn up, though there was no stoppage on the part of the bovines. And had the young Boers stayed silent when they

A RUSH OF BUFFALOES.—p. 44

halted, in all likelihood both they and their horses would in another minute have been run over, and trampled to death. But they did not stay silent; instead, all together raised gun to shoulder, and taking good aim, delivered a volley right in the faces of the black brutes that threatened them. There was a responsive crashing from some of their bullets, that only struck the great buttressed horns; but half-a-dozen of them told better, and a like number of the buffaloes, headmost of the herd, were seen to tumble over on the sward, dead as door-nails; the impetus of their rush shooting them their full body's length in advance of the rest.

The reports of the roers, their blaze and smoke —sounds and sights, in all probability, new to the wild animals—had an effect upon them instantaneous and deterrent. Whatever had been their worry behind, whether pursuit by lions or otherwise, it was now less a thing of fear than that they saw in front. So one and all came to a stop, quickly as they could gather up their legs. It

took time, though, the masses behind forcing the front rank forward, beyond where it was inclined to go.

Perhaps all might have resumed their onward career and the dreaded catastrophe, occurred all the same, had not the young Boers taken other precautions to prevent it. In this they succeeded, by a continuous shouting, yelling at the highest pitch of voice, while they hurriedly rammed powder and ball down the barrels of their roers; and when these were reloaded poured a second volley into the hesitating herd. It brought another half-dozen of the buffaloes to grass; but that was a thing they little cared about. Far more would they have been pleased to see the animals turn tail, and make away from them.

And with this very sight were they gratified in an instant after. The first fusillade, with its fire and smoke, to say nothing of the fatal effects, had caused fear among the wild bovines; the second brought dismay, and, not desiring to encounter a third, the headmost of the herd swung round, fol-

lowed by the rearmost, all going off in a direction that would carry them wide of the mowana.

"Praise be to God, our people are saved!" was the thought of the young Boers, more than one of them giving vocal expression to it.

CHAPTER VII.

A BUFFALO CHASE.

AS the danger seemed averted, and there seemed no likelihood of its recurrence, most of the young Boers drew up around the fallen buffaloes, and dismounted to *gralloch* and skin them. Three, however, who had become excited beyond restraint, kept to their saddles, and went after the retreating herd. This trio of implacable pursuers were Piet Van Dorn, the eldest son of Jari; Andries Blom, a nephew of Hans; a son of Klass Rynwald; all three nearly of an age. But between the two first there had long been rivalry as to which was the more accomplished hunter, with rivalry of another sort presently to be spoken of.

Their horses being of lighter hoof than the

heavy bovines, they were not long in again coming up with the latter; each, soon as within shot-range, singling out one, and delivering his fire. But only two of the buffaloes fell; the third, which was that aimed at by Van Dorn, though hit, keeping its feet and running on. Not with the herd, however, for the sting of the shot seemed to drive it crazy; and, separating from the rest, it struck to the left and went scouring off alone.

But it was not to escape thus, at least unpursued. Rather than it should, Piet Van Dorn would have ridden his horse to death, and almost to dying himself. His hunter pride was touched, and something more. What would Katharine Rynwald say —what think—on hearing that he had fired and failed to bring down the thing fired at—he alone of all the three? And she would be sure to hear of it; ay, be told of it within the hour. The cynical and satisfied smile on Andries Blom's face, as he saw the wounded buffalo bound away, seemingly but little hurt, was sure promise that the fair Katharine would come to know all about it. So

without waiting to say a word to the other two, Van Dorn reined round to the left, and pressed his horse to top speed, reloading his gun as he galloped.

Perhaps young Rynwald would have followed to lend him a helping hand, but for Blom. The latter did not want that buffalo killed; instead, he hoped with all his heart that it might still escape. And to give it a better chance, he cried out to the brother of Katharine, who bore his father's name,—

"Klass! let us two follow the drove, and bring down another couple, so that the camp people may have plenty of meat—dogs and all. We mayn't have such a chance for months."

Thus appealed to, Klass thought no more about helping Van Dorn, but dashed on after the other, who had already started in pursuit of the herd. They did not again come up with it, however; but that signified little to Andries Blom.

Meanwhile, Piet Van Dorn, who inherited all his father's hunting instincts, with much of his prowess,

was doing his best to overtake the wounded bull. For a bull it was, and of immense size; apparently the patriarch of the herd it had so unaccountably forsaken. This had caused the young hunter some surprise; and he was also surprised, as well as chagrined, at his first shot not having brought the bull down. For he had aimed at a vital part, with excellent opportunity, and could not account for his having missed. True, it was not altogether a miss, though not much better, the buffalo seeming but little hurt as it careered on over the veldt, tail high in air. Mounted on a strong, swift horse, however, Van Dorn at length got again within range of it; and once more raising his roer, delivered what he believed would be its death shot. Only to see, with chagrin greater than ever, that though he had made a hit, it was not a kill. Indeed, so far from the bull being further disabled, he but seemed to gather fresh strength, and with a loud bellow and angry toss of the head, continued on at a heightened speed.

But the pursuit was continued too; for with Piet

Van Dorn it was now do or die. Not for worlds would he have allowed that buffalo to escape him; and, once more appealing to the speed of his horse, as he rammed another cartridge down the barrel of his gun, he followed at his fastest. It was a tail-on-end chase, prolonged for nearly another league, before the pursuer thought himself near enough to send another shot at the pursued. He did so at length, hearing his bullet hit with a dull thud, as it buried itself in the flesh of the great bovine. Still the animal fell not, neither staggered, though it made no attempt to run on. The third shot produced an effect in it quite different from the two former, and, instead of further retreat, it stopped short, wheeled round, angrily shook its horned head, tore up the turf with its hoofs, then, with a loud bellow, charged back on its relentless pursuer.

Having perfect control of his horse, and trust in the animal's speed, the young hunter could have easily avoided the onset by galloping wide out of the way. And he was in the act of doing so, had half reined round, when he felt the horse sink beneath

PIET VAN DORN COMING A "CROPPER."—p. 52

him, and himself going a "cropper" over neck and head.

There was no mystery about the cause, which on the instant declared itself by a peal of unearthly laughter ringing loud in his ears, while at the same time he saw the creature that sent it up. His horse had gone knee-deep into the hole of a "laughing hyena,"* out of which the ugly brute now bounding ran off affrightedly over the veldt, as it went emitting its wild, weird cachinnations as the cries of a maniac fresh escaped from some lunatic asylum. All, too, as if in mockery at the hunter's mishap!

The horse was in no way injured, though, perhaps, better for his rider if he had been, for, on regaining his legs, which he instantly did, the triple scare he had got, from the oncoming of the buffalo,

* The so-called laughing hyena (*H. Crocuta*), as the other species, often make burrows, but sometimes appropriate those of the ant eater. This species, though smaller than the striped hyena, is of a fiercer nature and more dangerous. So much so as to have earned for it among the South African colonists the title of *Tiger wolf.*

his own tumble, and the screams of the hyena, was too much for him, and he broke off in wild stampede, leaving his master to look out for himself.

For some seconds Piet Van Dorn felt dismay, even to fearing death. The infuriated bull was fast nearing him, with head lowered, and horns set to crush or impale him. In another moment he might receive the fatal shock to know no more. For although he was also uninjured, and again upon his feet, there was no hope for him to escape by flight, and his gun was empty ; nor was there aught near to afford him shield or shelter. A look cast despairingly around revealed the veldt smooth and level for miles in every direction. Some bushes there were, with here and there a straggling tree, but none seemingly of sufficient size for climbing. At a last glance, however, he caught sight of one branched to the ground, and with a full, dense foliage. It might afford at least a temporary concealment, and without staying to think further, he made for it at lightning speed. Luckily it was in

his line of retreat, and as no time was lost, he got up to and behind it before the bull could overtake him.

Never was hunter more overjoyed than he, when after a quick inspection of the tree, he saw it had two trunks, either of which would bear his weight up to ten or twelve feet above the ground. But there was a *per contra*, which acted as a damper to his joy, on his perceiving that both were beset with sharp spines. For it was a *doorn-boom*,* a very "monkey puzzle," to ascend which would have deterred most *quadrumana*, as for a time it did him. Not long, however; it was "die dog, or eat the hatchet," a choice between horns and thorns, and Piet Van Dorn preferred laceration by the latter, to facing certain death by the former. So throwing his arm around the largest of the twin trunks he commenced swarming up, regardless of the thorns tearing into his flesh, even undismayed

* "Doorn-boom." Another of the thorny acacias so characteristic of South African scenery.

by the hissing of a *boom-slang*,* which with neck craned out threatened him from a branch above. But his resolution to climb had been too late. Scarce were his feet well off the ground when he experienced a shock that sent him sprawling back upon it, a concussion of such violence as for a time to deprive him of his senses. On recovering them he saw that he was lying some six or seven paces from the tree, bruised and bleeding. But where was the buffalo-bull? Raising himself on elbow, he looked all round; but no buffalo was in sight, nor quadruped of any kind. His own horse, with the hyena, had long since disappeared, and now also the horned bovine; he himself seemingly the only living, breathing thing over all that wilderness of veldt.

* "Boom-slang." Literally "tree snake." It is a large serpent, of yellowish brown colour, which makes its home in trees. It is not venomous, however, though of formidable aspect.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPED BY A TREE.

THE feelings of the young Boer may be better imagined than described. For a time mystification, then changing to weird fear, as a sense of the supernatural stole over him. Around the spot upon which he had been pitched were several small ant-hills; so, scrambling to the top of the nearest, and then standing erect, he had the veldt under his view for miles on every side. He could see no bush, nor other cover that would have concealed an animal so large as was the buffalo. Yet buffalo there was none on it.

It now recurred to him that his unconsciousness might have been of longer duration than he had supposed it; giving the buffalo time to scamper off out of sight. But this hypothesis was also un-

tenable for more reasons than one. For an animal of such bulk to have got beyond his view on that smooth, level plain was of itself highly improbable. Besides, why should the buffalo have run away from him? The last glimpse he had of it was while in mad, determined rush towards himself, and he knew it was the shock of its horns against the doorn-boom that had shot him off the tree as from a catapult. What reason would it have for retreating then, wounded as it was, and feeling itself, too, master of the situation, as it must have felt on becoming the aggressor? Of all this the young hunter was conscious, and not on that account the more mystified. For he had also bethought him of his three bullets sent into the buffalo's body, recalling how carefully he had taken aim, and how their failing to bring the animal down, had surprised and puzzled him. It was then the weird fear came over him in full, almost a horror, as the mystery remained unsolved. He rubbed his eyes, and once more took a survey of the veldt; scanning it minutely all over, as he

mechanically interrogated, "Am I in my senses? or has it been a dream?"

At this crisis his ears were saluted by a sound, seemingly in response to his questioning, and promising to end his perplexity. It was a loud snort, which he knew could only proceed from the throat of a buffalo-bull, and the same whose sudden disappearance had been puzzling him. Just then reverberating all over the veldt in a long, continued roar, it seemed to rise out of the earth.

But another noise in accompaniment was less misleading as to direction. This was the swish of leaves, with a snapping of twigs, as a tree tossed about by the wind. Turning his eyes upon that he had late essayed to climb, he saw it was in violent agitation; oscillating to and fro, as if under the impulse of a tornado. But the bellowing which he now knew to come from among its branches told a different tale, proclaiming the buffalo still there.

Though thus relieved from all awe of the unearthly, Piet Van Dorn was almost as much

mystified as ever. What could the animal be doing by the doorn-boom, and why had it stayed there? As yet he saw it not, the thick foliage intervening, but its repeated routs, with the shakings of the tree, left no doubt about its presence. The thought flashed upon him that the bull supposed he had succeeded in ascending the tree, and was still up in it; so in blind fury had remained there, at intervals butting the trunk and bellowing.

Under this belief, both natural and probable, the first impulse of the young hunter was to take to his heels, and put space between himself and the dangerous brute, as much as the time would permit. For at any moment the bull might part from the tree, or come round it, and again catching sight of him renew the attack. So dropping down from the ant-hill, he was about to make off, when he bethought of his gun, twice shaken out of his grasp, and lying on the ground near by. But it was also dangerously near the doorn-boom, and to get hold of it would be a ticklish affair. Still, to

return to the camp without his gun—bad enough having to go without his horse—would be fearfully humiliating. How delighted Andries Blom would be, and how he would crow over it!

"No! I won't go back without the gun, at all events," soliloquised Piet Van Dorn, with returning courage, more confidently adding, "Nor leave I this spot, till I can take with me a better account of what's happened than I can now."

Thus resolving, he stepped softly towards the roer, with his eye upon the shaking tree; and soon had the gun in hand again. Of course, it was empty; as while retreating before the buffalo, he had not found an opportunity to reload. Luckily, his quilted cartridge-belt was still fast buckled around his body, and a supply of percussion caps lay convenient in the pocket of his civet-skin waistcoat. Down went the cartridge and rammed home, almost as quick as a partridge-shooter could have charged his patent "central fire." And now ready, the young jager set face for the doorn-boom, determined to try final conclusions with the brute

that had parted him from his horse, besides giving

He saw the buffalo fixed and fast as in a vice.

him a scare, such as he had never before experienced.

Notwithstanding his restored courage, he was far from feeling reckless, and made approach with all due caution. For as yet, much of the mystery remained unsolved, and the behaviour of the buffalo as great an enigma as ever. The animal still continued its terrific routing, while the tree zig-zagged to and fro, both trunks, as though threatening to break down with a double crash. But for the thick foliage around the base, the young hunter would long before have had explanation of a thing so incomprehensible. It came at last, however, as he drew close in to the tree, and saw the buffalo with neck caught between the twin trunk, fixed and fast as if in a vice. In its furious rush it had forced its head through; the young flexible stems parting to let it pass, then reclosing; the neck was held as in a yoke, and the huge buttressed horns could not be drawn back again. So the bull had trapped himself in a tree!

Seeing how things stood, Piet Van Dorn could not restrain himself from giving way to loud laughter. He did smile, a vengeful smile, as he

thought of the trouble the black brute had put him to, with the chagrin it had caused him. But the better feeling of humanity soon triumphed over that of anger and revenge. He saw that the buffalo had received its death wound, from the shots he had fired at it, and its struggles in the clasp of the doorn-boom were but its last throes of life. Mercy appealed to him to put an end to them; which he did by stepping close up to the animal, and sending a fourth bullet into its body; this was so aimed as to deprive it of life, with scarce a kick given after.

CHAPTER IX.

BELATED ON THE VELDT.

FOR that day Piet Van Dorn's hunting was at at an end, but with a finale far from satisfactory to him. True, he had succeeded in killing the buffalo, and would not have to return to camp trophyless. But how about his horse? The latter might be there before him—in all likelihood was there already—if not lost on the veldt. If lost, it would be no slight misfortune; his mount being of the best ever ridden by a Vee-Boer, and one that could not well be replaced. Still he had not yet come to contemplating the matter in so serious a light; trusting to the animal's instinct to guide it back to its companions. But even this would have sinister consequences. That anything could have parted him and his pet steed, above all a

tumble, and its becoming known to the fair *fraülein*, his ladye love, was aught but pleasant to contemplate. And the horse returning riderless would naturally create alarm in the camp, where, besides a sweetheart, he had an affectionate mother and sisters who would be in an agony of apprehension about him, he knew.

Furthermore, the thought of having to trudge it back afoot, wounded as he was—in fact a good deal disabled—was of itself sufficiently disagreeable. But just on this account was it necessary for him to start off at once.

The sun was now little more than the breadth of its own disc above the horizon; and, if night caught him upon the veldt, he might have to stay in it till morning, almost certainly would.

Thus reflecting, he made no longer delay than the occasion called for. Bleeding wounds were to be bound up; ugly scratches got in the attempt at climbing the doorn-boom, and a thorn or two that still stuck in his flesh had to be extracted. Then there was the reloading of his gun, which it was

not prudent to have empty in such a place. Finally he cut off the buffalo's tail, to be taken along, less by way of trophy, than as evidence that, despite so many other mischances, he had not failed as a hunter. He would have preferred taking the horns, as he had never before seen so grand a pair; besides, it was to them he owed the life left him. But for their getting entangled in the tree, instead of his now, in cold blood, cutting off the buffalo's tail, the brute might have been standing over his lifeless body, trampling it into a mash. But, notwithstanding the service the horns had done him, and tempting as a trophy, it would take some time to detach them from the head, more than he had to spare, and in his disabled state they would be too much of a burden. So, shouldering his gun, with the bull's tail tied to its muzzle, he strode away from a spot so replete with incident, and what, but a short while before, seemed mystery incomprehensible.

Though comprehending it now, his perplexities were not over nor his troubles at an end. Scarce

had he commenced moving off when the hitherto unthought of question occurred to him,—

"What direction am I to take?"

It may seem strange his not thinking of this before; but men in his situation rarely do. The traveller on African plain or American prairie only becomes conscious of being lost when he *is* lost. Just such tardy consciousness now came to Piet Van Dorn, but with so keen a sense of it as to bring him to an abrupt stop before he had made half-a-dozen steps.

For a time he stood scanning the horizon around, but saw nothing there to give him guidance. He had hoped to descry a dark line along it; the timber skirting the stream by which they had encamped; but nothing of this was in sight. Even the great mowana, with several others of its kind he knew to be near it, were below the level of the plain.* This added to his uneasiness, telling of

* As stated in a former note, the "mowana" in girth and spread of branches is perhaps the largest of all known trees, but far from being the tallest, in height rarely exceeding a hundred feet.

the long distance he would have to tramp it, even with direction known. But the last was his present trouble, and he bent himself, with all the energies of his mind, to determine it. What assistance could he get from the sun? Nothing else seemed to promise any, so he turned his gaze upon that. He remembered its having been before his face while he was pursuing the buffalo; well remembered this, as it had been in his eyes, and so dazzled them as to interfere with his aim. Indeed, he blamed it, more than aught else, for his having failed to bring the animal down. But the sun had since changed place in the sky; true, not much, still enough to make it a blind guide, notwithstanding its brightness.

It would help him in a way, however; and turning his back upon it, he was about to start off eastward, when lo! tracks on the ground before him! Two sorts of hoof-marks there were; one cloven, the other whole and shod. The presence of neither surprised him, knowing, as he did, what animals had made them—of course the buffalo and

his own horse. It was where he had fired his third shot, and the chase had come to an end by the bull rounding upon him. But beyond he could see the same tracks in a long line over the veldt, indicating the direction in which he had approached the place. There was no need for longer doubt or hesitation, he could not do better than take the trail of the chase backward; and back on it he went.

Not far, however, before again getting interrupted. Out of some low scrub, through which it led, came a peal of wild hysterical laughter, that, to ears unacquainted with it, and in such a solitary place, would have been appalling. But Piet Van Dorn knew the sort of creature that laughed; was sure of its being the same which had lately saluted him in a similar manner, as if mockingly. Remembering this, recalling also, that to it he was indebted for the loss of his horse, with other resultant troubles, quick as lightning, he jerked his gun from his shoulder, and lowered it to the level. Almost at the same instant he perceived the hyena

HE JERKED HIS GUN FROM HIS SHOULDER, AND LOWERED IT TO THE LEVEL.—p. 70

making off through the bushes, as it sent back another of its unearthly cachinnations—the last it ever uttered. It did not even succeed in finishing that, being abruptly silenced by a bullet that dropped it dead in its tracks; the loud report of the roer 'replacing the animal's voice in prolonged reverberation over the plain.

With something like a feeling of satisfied vengeance, the young hunter saw the hyena roll over dead. But for it he might still have been astride his noble steed—almost surely would—with the buffalo's grand horns carried on the croup behind him. And how different his situation—how aggravating! But there was no time to dwell on it, however; so, hastily ramming down another cartridge, and without even deigning to look at the worthless quarry killed, he continued on.

So long as daylight lasted, there would be no difficulty about his taking up the trail; he could sight it going at a run. And run he did, now and then, despite his crippled condition, so anxious was he to get back to camp, though less on his own

account than that of the anxious ones there. Besides, to be out all night on the veldt alone and weakened as he was, were of itself a thing of danger. Not only cowardly hyenas, but courageous leopards, even lions, might be prowling about and make prey of him.

With such incentives to haste, he made it—all that was in his power. But despite all, he saw the sun sink down below the horizon without getting sight of the belt of timber he was looking for. Nor came it in view during the short interval of twilight that succeeded, and through which he had hastened on without halt or pause, till night's darkness was almost down. Then he made stop, and ascended an ant-hill, with a half-despairing hope that from its summit he might descry the wished-for beacon—perhaps see the lights of the laager fires.

He saw them not, neither blaze nor spark ; and, as night had now drawn its sable mantle around him, he had but the two alternatives—stay where he was, or go blindly groping onward. Making choice of the former, he stayed.

CHAPTER X.

A HORSE CHASED BY WILD HOUNDS.

THAT night there were sore hearts in the camp under the mowana, and eyes that closed not in sleep. A mother lay awake, thinking apprehensively about her son; sisters in like manner were in fear for the fate of a brother; while a young girl, not sister, but sweetheart, was no less uneasy about the absence of a lover.

Perhaps had Piet Van Dorn, the object of this concentrated solicitude, been only sure of its being shared by Katharina Rynwald—for she was the waking sweetheart—the long, unhappy hours he was constrained to pass upon the veldt would have seemed shorter, and been less irksome. As it was, he too slept little, in part kept awake by the pain of his wounds, and partly by torturing thoughts.

Withal, he took steps for passing the night, in the best and safest way possible under the circumstances. Anticipating a heavy dew,—which indeed, had already begun to fall—with that raw chilliness, as much the accompaniment of a tropical night as of one in northern climes, he had need to take precautions against it. Thinly and lightly clad, just as when interrupted at target-practice, ever since hotly engaged, and all over perspiration, experience told him there was danger from this alone. So, warned by it, soon as he had made up his mind to remain there he dropped down from the ant-hill, and bethought himself of kindling a fire. But for this the luck was against him. There was no wood near, nor anywhere within sight; not a stick. All around the veldt was treeless, and alike bare of bushes; the only relief to its monotonous nakedness being some score or two ant-hills, like hayricks scattered over it.

Yes, there was something more, which after a time came under his eyes; some tall bunch grass growing at no great distance off, or rather had

grown, for it was now withered and dead. True, it would not make a fire that could be kept up; but the young hunter saw it might be utilized in a way almost as good, by making a warm bed of it. Soon as thought of, he unsheathed his hunting-knife, and set to cutting the grass, as reaper with "hook and crook." Nor stayed he his hand, till several large armfuls lay along the earth. These, one after another, he carried up to the ant-hill he had first stopped at, and which, as already ascertained by him, had been abandoned by its insect builders.

It was but the task of a few seconds to form the dry grass into a rough, but fairly comfortable couch; upon which he lay down, drawing the straggled selvedge over him, by way of blanket and coverlet. Thus snugly ensconced, he took out his pipe, with flint, steel, and tinder, struck a light, and commenced smoking.

One passing near, and seeing a red coal glowing in that heap of haylike grass, with smoke rising in curls over it, might have wondered at the grass

not catching fire, and blazing up. But there was no one passing near, or likely to pass; and Piet Van Dorn continued puffing away in solitary silence.

After a time the tobacco in his pipe was burnt to the bottom; but finding it had given him some relief from the stinging of his sores, he refilled the pipe bowl, and went on smoking.

At length the narcotic property of the weed produced a soporific effect; Morpheus demanded his toll; and the wearied hunter, despite pain of wounds, and mental anxiety, sank into sleep, meerschaum in mouth. Luckily, he lay on his back, and the pipe from habit was held tight between his teeth, till the ashes in it became cold. Had it been otherwise, he might have soon and suddenly waked up, to find himself as a rat in the heart of a burning hayrick.

As it chanced, he slumbered long, though how long he could not tell. Dreamt also; in his dream, fancying himself still charged upon by the buffalo and that he heard its heavy tread on the firm turf

as it came thundering towards him! But was it fancy? Was the thing all a dream? Questions he put to himself, when at length awakened by the visionary scene, he lay listening. No, not all. The trampling sound was real and recognizable; not as made by a buffalo, but the hoof strokes of a galloping horse! Had there been any doubt about this, what instantly succeeded would have solved it —a neigh ringing clear and shrill on the calm night air.

Quick as a Jack-in-the-box, Piet Van Dorn was upon his feet; and with like alertness leaped up to the top of the ant-hill. The moon had meanwhile risen, and her light flooded the veldt all over, making objects distinguishable on it at far distance, almost as by day. But it did not need looking far for him to see the horse, nor an instant of time in recognizing the animal as his own. Not much longer, either, was he in learning why it galloped and screamed—for it was more scream than neigh that had waked up the echoes of the night: still waking them, in quick successive bursts, as the

horse rushed affrightedly to and fro. No wonder at his fright with such a following; full a hundred other animals flecked and spotted, as seen under the clear moonlight; to all appearance a pack of hounds in pursuit of him! And hounds were they, but such as never came out of kennel; far fiercer than these, for they were the *wilde-honden** of South Africa. They were scattered over the veldt, in squads here and there, with the horse careering from point to point between them; and go in what direction he would, it was to get headed off by one group or another.

At a glance the young hunter took in the situa-

* "Wilde-honden" (*Canis picta*). These wild dogs of South Africa have some affinities with hyenas. They are sometimes called the hunting hyena (*Hyena venatica*). They are as large as stag-hounds, and flecked and spotted in a similar manner, black and white blotches on a ground colour of reddish brown. But for their erect ears, which are large and black, they would bear a still greater resemblance to hounds. There is this also in their habit of pursuing their prey in packs, which renders them much more formidable than the hyena. They have little fear of man, and men have been often killed by them.

tion, and trembled for his steed. The poor animal was black with sweat, and evidently far exhausted. No doubt it had been running thus pursued for hours, and at any moment now might be pulled down, and torn to pieces. How was such a fate to be averted? How could the horse be saved.

The first impulse of its master, so interrogating himself, was to catch hold of his gun, and rush out to the rescue. The gun he caught hold of; but then came the thought, that instead of saving the horse, he would be himself sacrificed. Well knew he the habits of the wilde-honden with their fierce, savage nature, and that, in their then excited state, man would be no more feared by them than horse, or any other animal. It would be like boarding a pack of hungry wolves; in fact, flinging away his life. But what ought he to do? What could he? Nothing.

"Ah! yes; something!" he exclaimed, hope returning with a thought that had flashed across his brain. "There may still be a chance, if I can make him hear me."

Saying which, he thrust the tips of three fingers between his lips, and blew a whistle that went screeching across the veldt, repeating it several times. But much repetition was not necessary.

At the first note of it reaching his ears, the horse was seen to give a start of recognition; then, as the second was sent after, the sagacious animal, trained to the signal, answered it with a joyous neigh, and came galloping up to the ant-hills. In half a minute more he was among them; and now guided by a well-known voice, soon stood by his master's side, panting, quivering in every fibre of his frame, but confidently whimpering, as if at length assured of safety.

But he was not safe yet; neither he, nor his master, as the latter well knew. If he did not, it was instantly made known to him, as he saw the wilde-honden gather in from all sides trooping after. In a trice they too had entered among the ant-hills, and were still coming on for that beside which he and the horse stood. To the young hunter it was a crisis, dangerous as when being

charged by the buffalo, and equally slight seemed

He discharged his roer at the nearest and foremost of the honden.

his chance of escape. He had dropped back to the ground—knowing he would be no safer on the

ant-heap, which the clawed creatures could easily scale—and stood holding his horse in hand. The animal was still under saddle and bridle, as when it ran away from him. Should he spring upon its back, and attempt to escape by flight? Impossible. The horse was already tottering on his legs; another mile, perhaps half that with a rider on his back, and he would surely go to grass.

Piet Van Dorn was left no time for deliberation. What he did after was done in hottest haste, unreflectingly, almost despairingly. Yet were its results of the best; could not have been better, if planned deliberately and in coolest blood. He first discharged his roer at the nearest and foremost of the honden, which went rolling over with a howl. The report of the gun—noise so unexpected—caused the rest to falter and hang back; then, before they had recovered confidence, they were saluted by a second clap of that thunder, so new to them, with its blaze of lightning, which still further cowed them. For all, they did not yet seem inclined to retreat; and Piet Van Dorn, fancying

the flash more frightened them than the crack, suddenly bethought him of a way to make it more effective. Quickly striking a light, he set fire to the withered grass, on which he had lately been lying. It caught at once, flaring up with a flame that mocked the moon. And to keep it ablaze he employed the long barrel of his now empty gun, fork fashion, tossing the tufts of burning grass high in the air, all the while shouting at the loudest pitch of his voice. Continuing to shout so, he would soon have been hoarse. Fortunately he was spared this infliction; for the wilde-honden, at first sight of the conflagration, which they doubtless believed to be the veldt on fire, took to their heels, and scampered off in every direction; leaving the young hunter, and his newly-recovered horse, masters and sole possessors of the field.

CHAPTER XI.

TRACKING BACK TO CAMP.

HIS lost steed, thus strangely, as it were miraculously, restored to him, gave Piet Van Dorn gratification in more ways than one. The thought of his horse reaching the camp before himself, and so causing keenest alarm, had been his major trouble. But there was a minor one, far from insignificant, affecting his skill as an equestrian. Of his hunter-prowess he had the proof; but who would know how the horse had got away from him, save those who might put faith in his own account of it? That there would be some to discredit him, he knew; Andries Blom would take care of that. But now he would ride back to camp with the buffalo's tail flouted triumphantly at the muzzle of his gun, as flag captured from an

enemy; instead of sneers, or sympathy, to receive congratulations.

Under the excitement of this pleasant anticipation, that night he could sleep no more, nor did he try. And there was enough to keep him awake, in caring for his horse, the poor animal needing all the attention he could give it. Having cut some wisps of the withered grass, he rubbed its coat dry, which greatly refreshed it; while the grass itself proved a fodder not unpalatable. But the horse suffered more from want of water than food, as he could see; and there was no water near, an added reason for making quick departure from the place. He would have started away from it at once, but the sky had become suddenly overcast, the moon obscured by thick cumulous clouds, and the night darker than ever. He could barely see the white ant-hills close around him, and of course the trail he had needs still follow would be undistinguishable. So he must wait for the morning's light.

But light came sooner, and from a different

source—out of the clouds themselves. They were rent by forks of lightning, and illumined by its flashes, with an accompaniment of thunder. Rain followed, descending in sheets, as if emptied out of dishes—true storm of the tropics.

There was water now for a hundred thousand horses, yet how was he to catch enough for one? He had no vessel, or aught else, to collect as much as a mouthful, though his animal was in a very agony of thirst, himself the same. He looked around in hopes of seeing a puddle, but there was none. Soon as it fell the water filtered into the loose sandy soil, as if poured into rat-holes. What was to be done?

"Ha! A happy idea; the very thing itself!"

So soliloquized he at sight of the rain running down the sloped sides of the ant-hills in rivulets. Drawing knife again, he commenced delving into the firm tough compost, and kept at it till he had hollowed out a trough capable of containing a gallon. Then making some diagonal scratches to guide the water into it, he had the satisfaction of

seeing it soon fill, while he and his horse drank their fill also.

The downpour was not of long continuance, though long enough to leave him without a dry rag on his body. Little recked he of that now, being far more solicitous about another effect it might have produced, and which he feared it had. Nor was his fear groundless; for when day at length dawned, and he rode out to get back upon the trace hitherto guiding him, not a sign of it was to be seen, neither track of horse nor buffalo. They had been all filled up by the rain wash—completely obliterated—and once more he was a lost man!

This time, however, he was less dismayed, from having his horse under him. The sun had not yet risen, but the aurora, its precursor, told him which point was east; and, believing this to be the right direction, he took it. But long after the sun was up, he found himself wandering on the veldt, as much puzzled about his course as ever. The points of the compass he knew well enough, but

the belt of timber was still invisible, and he may have gone too far eastward.

He was about reining round to try another slant, when again tracks came under his eye—hundreds of them. All buffalo tracks these were, the hoof-prints well defined and easily recognizable. For the ground was different from that by the ant-hills, a firm, stiff clay, which had resisted the beating down of the rain. He had little doubt of their being made by the drove of yesterday's chase, and less after riding in among them, and making note of their number; the buffaloes had been close to the camp-ground, and it only needed proceeding along their trail to reach it.

Once more was Piet Van Dorn full of confidence. But only for a very few seconds, when uncertainty again took possession of him. In what direction had the buffaloes been going when they passed that point? Towards the camp, or from it, after being met and turned by the marksmen? He was unable to answer this question, and its answer was of absolute necessity ere he

could proceed a step farther. Without it he knew not which was his way, and would be as likely to take the wrong as the right one. It might be of serious consequence if he went wrong—indeed fatal—so what he should do next needed deliberation.

What he did do was, first to make more careful examination of the hoof-marks, hoping from them to draw deductions that would serve him. Not as to time; in that respect there could not be any great difference between the tracks going toward the camp and those from it. Even if there had, the rain would have rendered it imperceptible. But there might be a difference in the stride: animals pursued would make longer bounds than if running at will.

His new inspection, however proved of no avail; nor could it, as he now bethought himself, recalling the fact that the buffaloes were in full run when first seen, and likely long before.

He was about raising his eyes despairingly, when something on the ground caught his glance,

and kept it rivetted. It was only a little pool of water—rain that had fallen still lying—but water dyed red, and with blood, beyond a doubt! Of this he was confident; and equally sure it was blood from one of the buffaloes that had been wounded when the volleys were fired into the drove.

Hitherto he had been rather inclined to go as they had gone, still thinking his proper course lay eastward. Now he knew better; and without further delay, wheeled his horse round, and struck along the trail backward.

Thenceforth it was all plain sailing, the track easily distinguishable, in places as if a steam-plough had passed along turning up the soil. He could have gone at a gallop, and would but for sparing his horse, which still showed signs of suffering from the terrible strain late put upon it. Withal, he made fair way, and in another hour came upon familiar ground, where the buffalo bull he had himself pursued separated from the herd. Without seeing its tracks, or those of his horse, he could not have mistaken the place. There lay

the carcases of two other buffaloes, the pair killed by Rynwald and Blom. They were little more than skeletons now; for as he rode up to them nigh a score of jackals went scampering off, while twice that number of vultures rose sluggishly into the air.

At this point, for the first time since leaving it, Piet Van Dorn caught sight of the timbered belt, to comprehend why he had not sooner sighted it. The reason was, the river, with some miles breadth of the adjacent terrain, being below the general level of the plain. He saw the mowana, too, under which was the laager, perceiving that he was even yet leagues from it. But distance no more troubled him; his thoughts, as his glances, being now given to two horsemen who were coming in quick gallop towards him. On their drawing nearer he recognised one of them as Hendrik Rynwald; the other not Andries Blom, but his own brother.

They had come in quest of him, sent by anxious friends, themselves as anxious as any. Rejoiced were they at the encounter, and not less he, though

his joy in part proceeded from another and different cause. Never listened he to sweeter words than those blurted out by Hendrik Rynwald, a generous, guileless youth, who said, grasping his hand,—

"I'm so glad, Piet, to see you safe! And won't Sis Kattie, too! I don't believe she slept a wink, all of last night."

CHAPTER XII.

A FORMIDABLE OBSTRUCTION.

EXPLANATIONS having been hastily exchanged, the trio of young Boers turned face toward the camp. Burning to make known the joyful news, Rynwald and Piet's brother would have gone back at a gallop, and so Piet himself. But there was something to delay them: this the horse late chased by wilde-honden. The rain, at first refreshing the animal, had afterwards produced an opposite effect, and the result of the sudden change from heat to chill was a founder, the creature being now barely able to keep on its legs. As it could not carry him further without cruelty, its merciful master, dismounting, led it along.

This entailed slow progress, and thinking of those in the camp, with anxieties to be relieved,

young Rynwald proposed galloping on ahead. To this neither of the others objected, and he was about spurring away from them, when there arose another obstruction, of a still more formidable kind. An animal it was, seen standing right on the track he would have to take—one that could not be passed with impunity. Many animals were there, for it was where several other buffaloes had been shot down, whose carcases, now mangled, were surrounded by jackals, hyænas, and vultures. But it was not any of these that stood in Hendrik Rynwald's way, in an attitude of angry menace. Instead, the king and master of them all—a lion; one of the largest and fiercest-looking any of the young hunters had ever seen, much less encountered. The tawny brute appeared as though he had but late arrived on the ground, coming in at the end of the feast to find only bare bones; and, being hungry, the disappointment had roused his rage to the highest pitch of fury. Having caught sight of the oncoming horsemen, he evidently intended venting his spleen, as well as

appeasing his hunger, on one or other of them. He stood crouched and roaring, with mane erect and tail oscillating to and fro; both the attitude and action well known to lion-hunters as indicative of greatest danger.

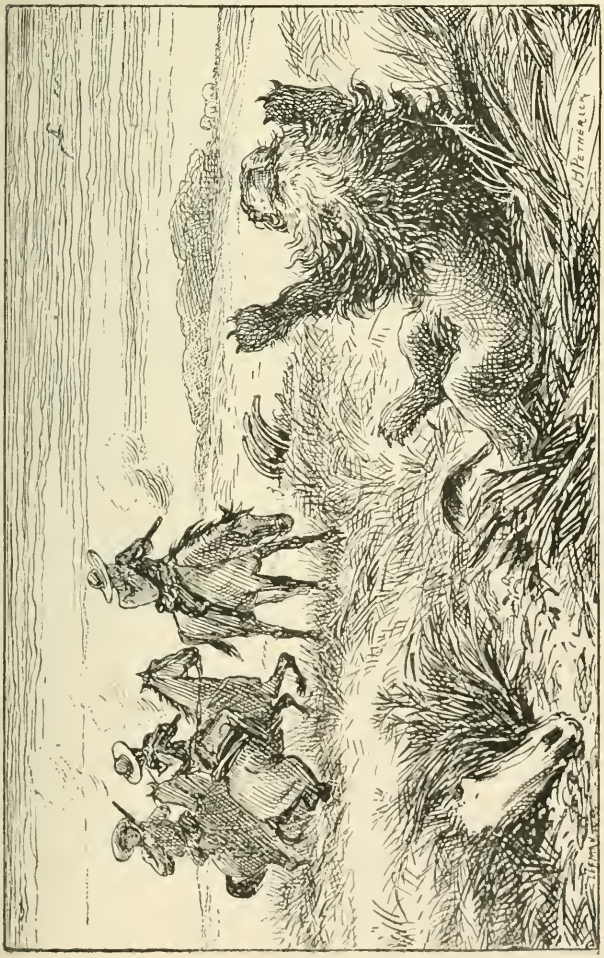
The two bestriding fresh horses need not have much feared the black-maned brute, and for that matter could have avoided an encounter with it by riding wide away and around. For to a man well mounted the lion is only dangerous in thicket, or jungle, hindering free action to the horse. But circumstanced as they were, the young Boers saw that only two of their horses had a fair chance of escaping thus, and perhaps but two of themselves. The third must surely come to grief in any attempt at shunning the lion, and to face it boldly could not well have worse result; so facing it was instantly determined on. Indeed, the resolve could not have been delayed; as at this place the veldt was overgrown with tall grass, and they were close to the danger before sighting it—so close, that in a dozen of his cat-like leaps the lion

might at any moment launch himself in their midst.

Less from any hope of his now staggering steed helping him to escape, than the impulse of instinct —or rather habit—Piet Van Dorn sprang back into the saddle; and the three, drawing their horses' heads together, remained at halt with their eyes fixed on the leeuw. The brute was within range of their roers, and the question was whether all three should fire together, or in succession.

Not much time was allowed them for determination, in fact, not any. Scarce had they their guns in readiness when, with a roar loud as last night's thunder, the lion came vaulting towards them.

The three pulled trigger almost simultaneously; two of them, Hendrik Rynwald and the younger Van Dorn, to miss, their frightened horses as they danced about spoiling their aim. Different was it with that ridden by Piet, whose forlorn condition was, possibly, as unexpectedly the saving of his own and master's life. Too far gone even for affright, he stood stock still; nor budged an inch, till the



A bullet went crashing through its skull.

roer, with muzzle projected beyond his ears, belched forth flame and smoke; a bullet at the same time, which striking the leeuw fair on the frontlet, went crashing through its skull. As a result the creature, so dreaded, tumbled instantly over like a shot rabbit, and lay in the long grass equally harmless.

With all South Africans, be they natives, colonists, Vee-Boers, or other, the killing of a lion is an event to be chronicled, and he who kills one is deemed to have performed a feat worthy of great praise; of course all the greater when one of such size as that which had fallen to Piet Van Dorn's bullet. Its skin would be a spoil indeed, and he determined taking it with him. There was no longer such need for haste on his part, as Hendrik Rynwald could now carry out his original intention of preceding to camp—which he did.

Dismounting again, the brothers set about stripping the leeuw of its pelt; an operation which cost them but a few minutes' time, both being used to such work. Then with the skin thrown over the

saddle, they continued on toward the timber, Piet leading his horse as before.

In another half-hour, or so, they were near enough the camp-ground to make out the figures of the men and animals that occupied it; to see something, moreover, which filled them with surprise, even amazement. There was commotion in the laager and around it, people rushing excitedly hither and thither; horses and oxen being caught up and led hurriedly from point to point. Borne on the still air also they could hear voices, shouts, uttered in alarm as the tone testified.

In wonder at what it all meant, the brothers pushed faster forward. Piet, no longer so tender with his halting steed, forced the animal into a trot, himself running alongside. And when within nearer view their wonder was no less, instead greater, and now with fear added. For they saw the waggons drawn out upon the open veldt, with the oxen in long line attached to the trek-touws, while the horses were all under saddle and bridled. Clearly the camp was being broken up, and about

to be abandoned. But for what reason? Had the Matabelé turned hostile, and was a party of them threatening attack? But no, it could not be that. If attacked, the laager would be the best place for resistance; far safer than with the waggons *on trek*. What then could be causing a movement so unexpected—so inexplicable? The two youths were in a very maze of mystification. But not much longer were they left in it. When within half a mile of the camp, a horseman came riding in all haste towards them—Hendrik Rynwald.

"What is it?" hailed they, soon as he was within hearing.

To receive for answer, "The *tsetse!* The *tsetse!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

ATTACKED BY "TSETSE."

IN all likelihood few of my readers need telling what is the tsetse, Dr. Livingstone and other travellers having given full account of this scourge of Southern Africa.

An insect, little bigger than the common fly of England, but whose sting is deadly as the bite of rattle-snake or cobra-di-capello ; fortunately not to man himself, but to man's best friends in the animal world—dogs, horses, cattle, and sheep.* So when Andries Rynwald called out the name of the venomous creature, Piet Van Dorn and his

* "The tsetse" (*Glossinia morsitans*). Although the sting of this insect is fatal to the domesticated quadrupeds above named, the mule and ass are not injured by it. Neither are any of the wild animals that inhabit the districts infested by it—a circumstance seeming strange and inexplicable.

brother had instant and clear comprehension why the camp was being so abruptly abandoned. The tsetse had made its appearance there; in flight lay the sole chance of saving the stock, and even this might be too late.

Only within the hour had the danger been discovered, by the presence of the insect becoming known. On the days before, and up till nigh noon of this one, nothing had been seen of it after most careful search. As a customary precaution they had looked for it all around the mowana. Had it been observed, no camp would have been established there, much less a laager; not even the shortest halt made. But confident of the place being uninfested, the wearied travellers had joyfully outspanned with the intention of taking a long spell of rest. Then, the alarm caused by the buffaloes over, they had breathed freely again, and were enjoying themselves more than ever; for that danger, so far from resulting in damage, had proved a profit to them. The daily provisioning of such a large party called for a goodly quantity

of meat, more than was always obtainable by the chase. On the Karoo, just crossed, wild animals were so scarce and shy, that with all the skill of their hunters the larder had run low. And no longer having their sheep to depend upon, the buffaloes coming that way, with so many killed, had been a bit of rare good luck, seeming almost providential.

Nor did they fail to make the best of it; these animals having been skinned and butchered; the choicest of their beef cut into thin strips, and hung over riems stretched between the trees for conversion into *bultong*.* There they were still hanging, like strings of sausages; the red meat fast becoming a mahogany colour as the hot sun shone down upon it, and drew out its juices.

The *naacht-maal* of the evening before had been a rich repast. The ant-hill kitchen-range, again

*"The "bultong" of the South Africans is meat cured in a similar fashion to the *tasaio* of the Mexicans, and *charqui* of South America, commonly know as "jerked beef." The process is of great service in countries where salt is a scarce commodity, or does not exist.

called into requisition, had sent up its appetizing odour, with buffalo steaks frizzling in the pans, and tongues, the tit-bits, simmering in the pots. The same for the *morgen-maal* of this the next day, which, withal, had been far from cheerful. Quite the reverse to the relatives of Piet Van Dorn, as to most of the camp people, the missing youth being a general favourite. Anxiety on his account, keen throughout all the night and morning hours, had reached its keenest when Andries Rynwald was seen coming back at a gallop, and alone. He seemed the bearer of bad tidings, while in reality those he brought were of the best, relieving every one on the instant of his arrival. Indeed, before it, as from afar off he had shouted, to ears acutely listening, "Piet's safe!" soon to follow the joy-giving announcement with account of why the brothers lagged behind.

Again was there gladness in the camp, greater than ever, as it always is when the lost are found. But, alas! it was not of long continuance. Scarce had the returned searcher dropped down from his

ATTACKED BY TSETSE.—p. 104

saddle, when those who gathered clusteringly about him and his horse became conscious of a sound, which caused one and all to start and cry out. It was but as the buzz of a blue-bottle, but with sharper intonation and intermittent. In short, they knew it to be the "tzip" of the tsetse; at the same instant catching sight of the insect itself, its brown colour, with yellow-banded abdomen, rendering it easily recognisable. With its long wings in whirring play, it was flitting about over the horse's body, as if in search of a spot to settle on.

Eager hands were stretched forth to seize hold of, or crush it. They supposed it to have come along with the horse, and so the only one of its kind there. But their efforts were idle; with the sun high and hot, the tsetse becomes exceedingly active, and as difficult to be caught as a *bombylius* or dragon-fly. Darting from point to point, it eluded all their attempts; in fine, retreating from its persecutors with a bizz that seemed to say, "Catch me if you can."

It flew off towards some of the trek oxen that

chanced to be near, and several of the men followed in hopes of being able to kill it there. But their surprise was light compared with their alarm, when, on getting up to the oxen, they saw not one tsetse but a score of them; ay, there might be hundreds or thousands for aught they could tell. The pestilent insects were flitting about everywhere, and it was evident not only the trek oxen, but the milk cows and horses were being assailed by them. The dogs, too, as could be told by their rushing around and biting their own bodies; some closing their jaws with a snap, like the shutting of a snuff-box lid, in their efforts to seize the creatures that were torturing them.

It was now that the camp rang with that cry which had caused consternation in many another, and broken many another up.

"Tsetse—tsetse!" called out half a score voices in chorus. "Gott en himmel! They're swarming all around!"

Then followed a scene of wildest excitement; that rushing to and fro observed by Piet Van Dorn

and his brother as they came within sight, and heard the racket of shouts which had so mystified them.

They understood it all now, before Rynwald came up to them; who, after some hurried words of explanation little needed, reined his horse round, and the three rode together to the camp.

On arrival there, Piet Van Dorn was embraced by loving, affectionate arms, and had kisses showered on his cheeks. Even a sly one got he from his sweetheart, in a shadowed spot under the trees. But not much was made of the spoils he had brought back. Just then the Vee-Boers had other fish to fry—a great danger to get rid of—which he, as all the rest, was called upon to combat.

Quickly dismounting, he lent a hand of help in the lading of the waggons, which soon after—packed in a hurried, higgledy-piggledy fashion—were ready for the route.

CHAPTER XIV.

CROSSING A "DRIFT."

AS yet the alarmed emigrants had not decided on the direction to be taken. Up stream was that which led to the district of country they were *treking* to. But to keep on the river's banks, wooded as these were, might be to continue in the infested region, and they would nothing gain by changing their place of encampment. At rest, or moving, their animals would become victims to the insects' venom all the same. So before starting, a consultation was held to determine the route. Hurried it was, and without unanimity of opinion. Jan Van Dorn, leader of the party, believed the tsetse had been brought thither by the buffaloes, and was not anywhere else than just around that spot. There was much probability in this view, regarding the behaviour of these animals in their

mad rush and routing. Not that they need have feared the insect; as, unlike with domesticated cattle, its sting is never fatal to them. But it annoys, and often sets them on the run. Despite this likelihood, the other two *baases*, Blom and Rynwald, differed with Van Dorn. In their belief there was tsetse all along the stream, up and down, and their best way would be to trek off from it inland—anywhere.

While they were still undecided, the Gordian knot was cut by their guide, Smutz. The nimble Hottentot had climbed, monkey-like, into the highest branches of the mowana, where he commanded a far view of the surrounding country; and from this elevated position had descried a place of probable safety. It was a range of high hills running parallel with the river; a dry, rocky ridge without any sign of timber on it, and therefore unlikely to be infested with the fly so much feared.

Shouting down his discovery, it brought their deliberations to an abrupt end, with a resolve to

make straight for the hills. In any case it would be but the loss of a day or two's time, with the toil of some twenty miles' extra travel, the ridge appearing to be about ten or twelve miles off. But what of that, so long as it saved their stock from destruction? And, without further delay, the word went round for starting; the oxen were whipped up, and the waggons moved off, leaving the laager, late full of busy life, a deserted, desolate spot.

The river had still to be crossed, as they were on its southern side, and the range of hills lay north. But about this they anticipated no difficulty; having examined the *drift* on the day before, and found it easily fordable. When the attempt came to be made, however, it did not prove so easy. The rain-deluge of the preceding night, which half drowned Piet Van Dorn among the ant-hills, had swept all over the country, and the stream was now in freshet to full channel.

There were ways of getting the people across, the animals, too. But the waggons must wait for the subsidence of the waters. Luckily, this had

commenced, and, as they could see, was going on rapidly. Many South African rivers rise to highest flood, to fall again within a few hours, and such an one this appeared to be. With glad eyes they saw it go down by inches, as though the water were filtering into the earth underneath, as well as running off down stream.

Confident it would soon be at its normal level, they did not think of outspanning. Instead, the oxen were kept attached to *dissel-boom** and trek-touw; only the horsemen dismounting to make things more trim for the passage across.

In an incredibly short space of time the water was low enough to attempt it; and then arose a chorus of shouts, with cracking of whips, as drivers, *achter-shambok* men, and forelopers, urged the oxen down the sloping bank into the stream's bed. Not less was the fracas while the fording was being made, every moment of it a continuance of en-

* The "dissel-boom" of a waggon is the pole to which the hind oxen are attached, the others in front drawing by the trek-touw.

couraging cries, and whip-cracks loud as pistol shots, till the three huge vehicles were dragged out on the northern shore, high, but not dry; instead, dripping wet up to their boxes.

The fording had been effected without serious accident, though accompanied by one of a comical character, in which Andries Blom was the conspicuous figure. This ill-starred youth, now more than ever jealous of Piet Van Dorn, while crossing the drift, rode close to the waggon that carried Katharina Rynwald. With the hope of re-establishing himself in her good graces, he was making great show of solicitude for her safety, as also display of his horsemanship. This is a set-off against Piet's late pitch out of the saddle, which had become known, and his own account of it credited by all, save Andries himself. The latter, however, affected disbelief in it, insinuating that it was a simple downright "throw," no hyena-hole, nor any other having aught to do with it. While wading his horse alongside the waggon, he had sneeringly said as much to Katharina, to get for his pains

a look of reproachful scorn. Stung by it, and the jealousy that tortured him, he became reckless, spurring his horse angrily in front. But the animal, angered too, commenced pitching about, and tripping on the loose, slippery stones in the stream's bed, went head over, not only sousing its rider, but flinging him from the saddle. As the two struggled out upon the bank, paces apart, the laughter that from all sides saluted him was bitter as though it came from the throats of fiends; all the more that a sweet silvery voice took part in it, which he knew to be Katharina's.

But the merriment at his discomfiture was of short duration. Just then, all were oppressed with an apprehension of the tsetse having already done its deadly work, and that the fatal result would declare itself later on. It was not that, however, which brought their hilarity to an end, abrupt as though a bombshell had burst in their midst. This came from a shout sent from the opposite side of the stream—that they had just left—a cry of alarm. Looking across, they saw

one of the Caffres, who had lingered behind at the laager to pick up odds and ends, coming at full run down to the drift, as he ran, excitedly exclaiming, "Olifants! olifants!" (Elephants.)

What was there in this announcement to alarm them? Instead, a professional hunter would have hailed it with delight, thinking of ivory and the gain to be got from it. So might they, but for a spectacle which on the instant after they had under their eyes. Looking back upon the open list, late traversed by them, they beheld a band of elephants, nigh a hundred in number, in all likelihood the same met on their midnight march across the Karoo. But whether they, or others, the danger was all the same and imminent. The huge pachyderms were coming over the veldt and in their usual fashion, single file, making straight for the drift, and likely to cross there. These sagacious animals know all the waters within any district frequented by them — the springs, vleys, and streams, with their fording places. The herd was advancing as if along an oft-trodden track, and the

apprehension of the Vee-Boers—a very fear—was not without sufficient cause. Should the elephants

He was saluted by a fusillade from the opposite side.

continue on over the stream, it would be sure destruction to everything that chanced in their way. The rush of the buffaloes, lately dreaded,

were as nothing to it. It was now that the head *baas*, Jan Van Dorn himself, assumed authoritative command, and gave display of his intelligence; calling to the forelopers to lead off, with the drivers and jambok men to whip up after. The waggons were instantly switched to one side, and clear of the track, which the elephants, left unmolested, would be likely to take. The driven cattle, too, were hurried out of the way, the people at the same time seeking safety in concealment.

But the old jägers had no intention of leaving the olifants unmolested; instead, he meant to make slaughter among them, and from their tusks get some compensation for the loss sustained by that wholesale poisoning of sheep.

He had barely time to arrange his battery—all the available guns belonging to the party—as the leading elephant, a grand old tusker, with ears big as carriage umbrellas, entered the open list in the timber, the rest still following in file. Though going only in a walk, it was with a stride that

carried them along fast as most other animals in full run, and in a few seconds after the tusker stood on the stream's bank; then with a flourish of trumpets, and a whirl of his flexible trunk, struck straight down into the water.

But never to go out of it again alive, on his own legs. Scarce had he wetted his huge hooves, when he was saluted by a fusillade from the opposite side that not only tumbled himself over, but five or six of his fellows following immediately behind, some of them wounded, some killed outright. The rest of the herd took instant affright and wheeling round, went off in wild rush, no longer aligned, but in scattered confusion, breaking through the bushes in every direction.

When the waggons were again drawn back upon track, and moved off inland, in addition to their usual loading, they carried several hundred pounds weight of valuable ivory.

CHAPTER XV.

A CAMP FULL OF CARCASSES.

ANOTHER encampment of the Vee-Boers, their three waggons as before, forming its substantial centre. In almost everything else it is different from that under the baobab, being situated in a *kloof* * between two rocky ridges, which, trending towards one another, meet and form a sort of *cul-de-sac*. The valley's bottom is of some breadth, grass-covered but treeless, save some stunted bushes scattered thinly over it, with here and there a tall camel-thorn, from which hang the purse-like pensile nests of a colony of weaver birds. The ridges are of basalt, and along their slopes lie huge boulders, some square-shaped and big as

* "Kloof," the Boer's designation of a valley of the ravine order.

houses; other similar blocks being strewn about on the level below. Just over the camp, and shadowing it from the sun, is a high *kop*,* on whose ledges cling aloes, euphorbias, and other plants, characteristic of desert vegetation; for all is barrenness, above and around, the bottom land alone showing any sign of fertility. This last is due to a spring, which, issuing from the cliff's base, trickles down the valley, to be caught in a little pool, some hundred paces below. Being a permanent fontein, it afforded sufficient water for all the animals when they wanted it. But few of them want it now; most being dead, whilst those that survive are in death's throes, without hope of recovery. The fatal work begun by the tulp, is being finished by the tsetse; good as finished already—and the migrating graziers will soon be without stock of any kind, horse, ox, or cow. Even their dogs are dead or dying.

* The "kop" is a cliff-like promontory overhanging a valley or plain, nearly synonymous with the American "bluff." It is, doubtless, the Dutch radix of our word *cape*.

This wholesale fatality, as they have since ascertained, was brought about by the buffaloes ; some of the people, sent back to the river higher up, having there found no signs of the venomous insect. They had gone with a view to continuing the journey ; but before a fresh start could be made, the too well-known symptoms of tsetse-sickness had declared themselves, and all thoughts of treking further were relinquished.

For the first forty-eight hours the effect of the poison had not been perceptible, and there was a hope of the animals escaping. A hope which had to be abandoned when they began to water at the eyes, and run at the nostrils, their hair standing on end as in the midst of an arctic winter, while they were under the hottest of tropical-suns. Soon after came swelling of the jaws, scouring, with consequent emaciation, weakness to staggering ; some actually going mad, as with hydrophobia, and having to be shot. All would have been shot ere this, but for a lingering, half-despairing belief that some might still get over it.

This is now gone; many of them have been buried; and of those above ground, the dying lie mingled with the dead, groaning and moaning piteously.

When at length comes the conviction that all are doomed, the fiat goes forth to put the suffering creatures out of pain. The guns are again brought into requisition; a brisk, though reluctant, fusillade follows, and the camp is left without a living quadruped.

* * * * *

For a time there was silence, profound and solemn as that which succeeds the firing over a soldier's grave. Every one sate despondent, or stood in listless attitude, ignorant of what was next to be done. They but knew that to remain there would be out of the question, while treking away with their waggons was no longer possible. These huge vehicles, now teamless, with their white canvas covers, were as ships becalmed in mid-ocean; all sails set, but not a breath of wind to blow them on. And the migrating Boers

themselves might be likened to shipwrecked sailors —cast aways on a desert shore—for not much better was their situation. Around they saw the ruin of their hopes, the wreck of their fortunes, but nothing of what lay before them, or beyond.

Under such circumstances no wonder at their being sad and despondent.

But if silent, not so was the scene around. Throughout the kloof were noises enough, and more than enough, since all were disagreeable to their ears. Skulking among the rocks and bushes, the jackal gave out its long-drawn, lugubrious whine, in concert with the wild, hysterical laughter of the hyena; while from the ledges above came the hoarse wah-wah of baboons, as though these quadrumana were afflicted with colds, and all the time clearing their throats.

Along the cliff's crest were perched vultures of various species, sunning themselves, with wings outstretched, now and then uttering harsh croaks as they contemplated the rich banquet below, soon

to be ready for their beaks.* Eagles, soaring high in air, meant partaking of it also, as betokened by their necks craned downwards, and screams of eager concupiscence.

An interval having elapsed, and the necessity for action forcing itself upon his mind, the head baas, Jan Van Dorn, summoned his two associates into council, for deliberation on what should be done.

A flat-topped stone near the centre of the camp offered a convenient seat, and, sitting down upon it—all three pipe in mouth—the leader thus delivered himself,—

"Brothers! we're in a bad way now; it couldn't well be worse."

"Ya—ya, that is true," responded the others in a breath, Blom adding,—

"Nach Mynheer Jan, it couldn't possibly be worse."

"Then what ought we to do, think you?"

* There are no less than seven distinct species of vultures inhabiting South Africa; while the species of eagles are still more numerous.

To which merely formal question Van Dorn received no answer, the other two tacitly puffing away at their pipes in expectation that he would tell them. Accustomed to this sort of deference the old jäger no longer held back, but proceeded to unburden himself, saying,—

"Well, brothers; the first thing we must do is to look out for our lives—our very lives. And it's the only thing we can do now. To keep on to the place we were making for, even though sure of reaching it, wouldn't help us a bit. Without our cattle we'd be no better off there than here; and now that our horses and dogs are gone too, there's but small chance for us subsisting by the chase. Once our ammunition gave out, we'd be just as Bosjesmen, have to live on roots and reptiles. That's not the life for a Vee-Boer, nor the diet either."

"*Gott der himmel*, no!" was the deprecatory exclamation of Blom, sent forth between two puffs of smoke.

"So," continued Van Dorn, "I see no hope for us but return to the Transvaal."

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"Neither I. Nor I," assented the associate baases, Rynwald adding interrogatively,—

"But, Mynheer Jan, how are we to get back there?"

This was just the trouble that stared all in the face, and had been in their thoughts ever since the tsetse sickness first made its appearance among the stock. For in their thoughts, also, was the Karoo they had lately crossed with so much difficulty and danger. This when they had all the means of transport, waggons to carry their women, children, provisions, and other effects, with horses to ride upon. What would be the recrossing it without these, and afoot? Impossible, as Van Dorn well knew; and so declared, saying,—

"Overland, brothers, we never could get back. We are more than three hundred miles from Zoutpansberg, the nearest settlement of our people, as you know. Some of us might hold out to reach it, but not all; only the strongest. The weak ones, our dear ones, would many of them perish by the way. Need I say more?"

"No—no!" promptly responded Rynwald, thinking of a wife and only daughter, the fair Katharina. "That's enough, Mynheer Jan. We mustn't attempt to go back over the Karoo; it would be our ruin, as you say."

"Then how are we to go?" demanded Blom. "What other way?"

"By *water*," answered the head baas. "We must make down the river, and on to the sea."

"What river are you speaking of?"

"The Limpopo. The stream we've just left should run into it, not a great way below; and the Limpopo itself empties somewhere to the northward of Delagoa Bay. I have heard there is a Portugese settlement, a small port near its mouth, where whalers and coasting vessels occasionally call. If we can reach that, 'twill give us a chance to get down the coast to Port Natal, and then over the Drakenbergs back home."

"That would be a long voyage," suggested Blom, "full of all sorts of dangers, too."

"In time not near so long as by land, and not half as many dangers either—if we have luck."

"Ay, if we have luck. But suppose we haven't?"

"We must take the chances, Mynheer Hans; all the more as there's no help for it. But I'm sure it's our best way."

"So I," seconded Rynwald.

"But," said Blom, less objecting than to get a clearer comprehension of what their chief intended, "you don't propose our descending the river afoot —tramping along the banks, do you?"

"Certainly not! That would be a trudge to take time, indeed; harder than crossing the Kalahari* itself. We'll sail down to the sea."

"But what about boats? We have none."

"We must do without them—build rafts, which in a way will be better than boats."

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* "Kalahari," the name of the great South African desert, or Karoo, which extends north from the Orange River, and west of the Transvaal, for hundreds of miles. Its borders, and some parts of its interior, are inhabited by Bushmen and Bechuanas.

"Oh! that's your idea, Mynheer Jan. I suppose it's a good one, and for the best. Well, I'm willing too. So let us make it a water journey."

The other two having already pronounced in favour of this, the consultation came to a close by Van Dorn saying,—

"And, brothers; the sooner we start the better. We can gain nothing by staying longer in this tainted spot; but may lose something—our health, likely, if not our very lives."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CARNIVAL OF THE CARNIVORA.

NEEDLESS to say that Van Dorn's last words, pointing to the urgency of immediate departure, were convincing to his associate baases, had they stood in need of conviction. But neither did; they, as he, being but too glad to get away from a scene where they had suffered so much loss, to say nothing of the misery. The spectacle now under their eyes was itself sufficiently disagreeable, seeming a very charnel-house. Scores of carcasses lay in and around the camp; and, as the hot sun continued to burn down upon them, the effluvia was every moment becoming more offensive, and would soon be unbearable. True, they could be buried as those first dying had been. But, for days past, an

understanding prevailed that the encampment was to be changed, time and place alone remaining undetermined. The former had now come, and the latter been also resolved upon; no new ground, but one familiar to them—in short, that they had so lately and hurriedly abandoned.

They need have no fear of re-occupying it, nor had they. Tsetses might be swarming there thick as midges in midsummer; but nothing cared they now. The only hurt these insects could hereafter do was by their presence to remind them of the damage already done, recalling dissipated hopes and expectations. So far as the accursed fly was concerned, however, it was no longer thought of; and all were full of eagerness to be back under the mowana. They had pleasant remembrance of the hours spent beneath its shade, so different from that of the kop, which but gave them shadow when the sun had either not reached, or passed meridian. Besides, on the river's banks grew trees of many kinds, affording edible fruits, some even delicious. No wonder, then, at the general joy, when it

became known they were to move back to the river.

The prospect inspired every one, as it were, with new life; and when the moving commenced, as on the instant it did, all hastened to lend hand of help. For there was much work to be done, big burdens to be carried in the transference of their effects from camp to camp. And it would take more than one trip ere completed.

The women and children were marched off first, even these carrying loads proportioned to their strength. And with them went the first batch of regular carriers, to be followed by another, soon as the packages were made ready for transport; then another, and so on—all to return again. Thus down the ten miles of slope between mountain range and river passed a continuous stream of men bearing burdens, like ants on return to their hills; the same men soon after going back upward, unweighted, and with light elastic step. Only the downward journey was accomplished on the first day, as it was late ere they had commenced it.

But on the second they made the "round trip," and more; three times traversing the space between the camps.

Not all were of the last party that returned to the hills, only a certain number needing to go thither now. Most of the effects intended for removal had been got down on the second day, the waggons alone remaining in the kloof. Of course these cumbrous vehicles, of no use now, would be left behind; but not their tilts. These, sure to prove of good service afterwards, were to be fetched away, and it was chiefly for them the carriers had come back. The party consisted of half-a-dozen young Boers, with about twice the number of Caffres and Hottentots, Piet Van Dorn having charge of it.

The sun had set ere they re-entered the old camp; and as all were fagged out by the incessant toil of the two days, their thoughts alone dwelt upon rest and sleep. The return journey, their last, was to be made on the following morning, and there was no necessity for further work that

night. So they at once betook them to their respective sleeping places; the young white men climbing into the waggons, their native attendants, wrapped in *karosses*,* laying themselves along the ground underneath.

Soon all were buried in a profound slumber; the dismantled camp around them silent as a cemetery. But it was a silence of short duration. Scarce had they become unconscious, ere getting awakened by sounds which robbed them of the power of sleep, if not its desire. For their ears were saluted with the cries of wild beasts, coming from every side, and of so many kinds, it seemed as if all the predatory species of Africa were assembled within the kloof. In point of fact, most were there, attracted from far and near by the scent of the dead animals, whose carcasses were

* "Kaross." A wrap of blanket size and shape, made of the skins of wild animals stitched together; they are worn by most of the uncivilized natives of South Africa. Various sorts of skins are used in their manufacture; those of the leopard and cheetah, or hunting-leopard, forming the distinctive garb of a chief.

now far gone in decomposition. On previous nights there had been something of the same,

The journey back to the river.

though never such a racket as now. Then fires had been kept burning to frighten the beasts off;

but this night being warm, and the last they were to spend on that spot—tired, too,—the young men had neglected taking such precaution; imprudently, as all saw, when startled out of their sleep by the roar of a lion, multiplied in loud reverberation along the adjacent cliffs. It was but the prelude of a horrible chorus quick succeeding, in which could be distinguished the angry "gurr" of the leopard, the spiteful snarl of the cheetah, and the cat-like miaulling of the serval. Hyenas of different species alternatively howled, chattered, and laughed, while jackals contributed their snappish bark to the fear-inspiring din.

Fear-inspiring it was to those freshly awakened; all the more when, after rubbing their eyes, they looked off, to see a sight which made their flesh creep, and blood run cold. No wonder. Over the camp-ground were lions, leopards, and the other sorts, thick as sheep in a pen, in all attitudes, and every variety of action; some tugging and tearing at the carcasses, others in dispute about pieces already severed: still others rushing to and fro in

quest of a stray morsel. The moon shining in full effulgence rendered them distinguishable, almost as by daylight; while on the still calm air within the kloof, the roaring, growling, yelping, and howling, all repeated in echo from the cliffs, combined to make a very Pandemonium.

Fortunate for those who listened that the tilts were still upon the waggons, with end curtains of strong stuff to draw close—in part designed for just such a danger. In a trice everybody was inside them—white, black, and yellow—the flaps pulled to, and all made safe as might be. Still the situation was one of greatest peril. What if, after eating the dead animals, the devourers should turn their attention to the living men, and make a burst through the canvas? The stroke of lion's paw, or leopard's either, would tear that screen to sheds as though it were but tissue-paper, and they, concealing themselves under it, well knew this. But they knew also, that if left unmolested, more likely the fierce brutes, having filled their bellies, would retire from the ground, and give no further trouble.

For a time they were so left; but not long. The position was too ticklish and irksome for continued endurance. The young Boers, deprived of their rest, and kept in such a stretch of apprehension, soon began to chafe at it, till their impatience became anger, rendering them reckless. Besides there was one always eager to distinguish himself as a hunter, and never might such opportunity occur again. This was Piet Van Dorn, who at length casting all prudence aside, proposed opening fire on the enemy. Being chief of the party, and with controlling power, his proposal was unanimously agreed to; and, in less than five minutes after, the brutes making such noise over the camp-ground, heard other noises that were new to them—the cracking of guns—at the same time saw puffs of smoke, with jets of flame, darting out from the white covers of the waggons.

Surprise, with some fear, hushed the wild beasts into a momentary silence; the cowardly *canidæ*—hyenas and jackals—scampering off at the first fire. But the fiercer and more courageous felines kept

their ground, till a second volley had been sent into their midst; then only moving away with sullen reluctance, some even staying to receive a third discharge from the death-dealing guns. But of those that thus stayed, not many got off afterwards. The clear moonlight afforded a fine chance for sure aim, and the young Boers—all best marksmen—made deadly play with their roers, scarce missing a shot.

In fine, the camp was cleared of its fierce four-footed invaders, save those that had fallen. And of these could be counted a goodly array; four lions, with two lionesses, three leopards, and a couple of cheetahs!

Their pelts, stripped off the next morning, added to the weight requiring transport. But the young jägers could make light of this additional lading, in anticipation of the triumph such spoils would secure them.

CHAPTER XVII.

WATER-HORSES.

OVER a week has elapsed, and the Vee-Boers are still in their old camp under the baobab. Its appearance is much the same as during their former occupation of it—that is, the portion inside the laager fence. For though the waggons are absent, their arched covers, supported on short uprights, stand just as they stood, now doing service as tents. They are the sleeping-places of the women and children, also giving shelter to such household gods as need the protection of a roof.

To speak of a Vee-Boer having household gods may seem a misnomer, since he never has a house. Still there are certain Penates he carries about; the most cherished being a black-letter Bible, large as a volume of the "Encyclopedia Britannica," in

thick leather binding, with brass clasps. This ponderous tome goes with him, wander where he will; for the South African Dutchman is strong in the protestation of religion, whatever his practice of it.

There had been one such Bible in each of the three waggons—the respective belongings of the families, Van Dorn, Blom, and Rynwald—and, it need scarce be said, that these sacred volumes were not left behind in the kloof.

Outside, on the veldt, all is different. The groups of grazing stock are no more seen there—not a single head; while close to the laager's edge appears a new feature, a "*hartebeest house*,"* late erected. It is for the young whites of the party; the native employés contenting themselves with

* The "Hartebeest-house" is a hut of rude construction, the usual materials being reeds and grass with a plastering of mud. The name is derived from a fancied resemblance to the form of the antelope so called. Hartebeest-houses are common throughout Southern Africa, not inhabited by natives, but the poorer class of colonists, especially Vee-Boers when not on the move.

such coigns of shelter as are afforded by the trunks of the mowanas. In these, some have ingeniously hewn out cavities, large enough to give them lodgment, others having in like manner utilized the adjacent ant-hills.

All this bespeaks prolonged residence there, and not far off is a spectacle, showing the reason; telling also they have not been idle in the interval. Down on the river's bank by the drift is a scene of greatest activity, where some scores of logs have been collected, and are being made ready for the timbers of rafts. They are the trunks of *koker-booms*,* each about eleven feet in length, with a diameter of three. Their top-knots of bayonet-like leaves having been lopped off, they are now in process of desiccation, by huge fires that have been kindled around them. When the sap is drawn out, they will be light as cork wood, just the material required for raft-building.

* The "Koker-boom" is a species of aloe with a short thick trunk. When well dried the wood is even lighter than cork.

Jan Van Dorn himself superintends this quaint naval architecture, by good luck having skilled assistants. As it chances, among the native employés are two *Macobas* * of Lake Ngami—fugitive from the tyranny of King Letchoulatebe — who understand all about the various kinds of craft used in South African inland navigation, and under their hands the rafts will be properly constructed.

Nor is this the only industry in progress. On the other side of the camp, out upon the open veldt, a number of the young Boers are busy too, their work being the conversion of fresh meat into bultong. Strips of it hang over riems extended between the trees, where these stand thinly, so as not to shadow it from the sun. It was the same on a former occasion, but the meat is not the same. Then it was buffalo-beef, which has been all lost. For at the time of their hurried abandonment of the place, it was not thought sufficiently cured to

* The "Macobas" are the boatmen of Lake Ngami. They have affinity with the Bechuanas; but are of a race and class apart. They are also of darker complexion.

be taken along, and it was their intention to return for it. Unluckily, left hanging too low, the hyenas and jackals had dragged it down, and devoured it to the last scrap. The sausage-like strings now replacing it, are the flesh of elands, and other large antelopes, the carcass of a giraffe having contributed to the stock. While the raft-builders had been busy with axe and bill-hook, the hunters were alike industrious in the chase, and have already laid in a good store of provisions for the proposed voyage. It may be a long one—how long they cannot tell—and in descending the rivers they might not easily find subsistence for such a numerous party. At all events, the precaution is a wise one, and fortune has favoured them in it, by guiding many wild animals toward the drift; some on their way to drink, others intending to cross over. They have enough meat now to last them for weeks—even months—once it becomes bultong; and, to insure its becoming this of the best, light fires are kept underneath it, whose gentle heat, with the smoke, assists in the curing process.

Nor are the voyagers to be dependent on an exclusively meat diet. There are yet left them several bags of meal, both of maize and Caffre-corn;* while, as already said, the trees standing near bear a variety of edible fruits and nuts, some of which are being added to the intended "ship's stores." Collecting these is the task of the youngsters; so all, young and old, have something or other to do. And they are doing it with all their might and will. For even the youngest now know that their situation is one of uncertainty and peril; dangers on the spot, with other dangers ahead, the avoidance of which calls for every exertion.

* * * * *

Another week has passed, showing much pro-

* Both Indian corn (*maize*) and Caffre-corn (*Sorghum Caffrorum*) are cultivated in Southern Africa, and the meal of both is in common use among the Boers of the Transvaal. The Caffres also grow large quantities of another species of Sorghum (*S. Saccharatum*) for the sake of its stem; which they chew, as the negroes of America do sugar-cane, its juice being equally as sweet.

gress made. In short, the rafts are finished, and afloat on the water. There are three of them, corresponding to the three families who make up the migrant party. It was not for this, however, that a trio was constructed ; but because of the stream being too shoal and narrow to admit of a raft large enough to carry all. That is a thing to be thought of when they reach the great river below.

Each of the three built has a breadth of beam of some ten to twelve feet, in correspondence with the length of the koker-booms ; whose trunks, laid side by side, have been firmly lashed together by lianas—the *Baavian-touw*.* Lengthwise, the rafts are nearly four times as much, from stem to stern being about forty feet. On what might be called the quarter-deck of each, one of the waggon-tilts has been placed on supporting stanchions, and is

* The "Baavian-touw" (*Anglice*, "*baboon-rope*") is a species of climbing plant, or liana, with long stems and heart-shaped leaves. By the Boers it is employed as cordage, and for many purposes, this primitive sort of rope being often convenient, where no other is obtainable.

the cabin. On the fore, also, is a sort of shed or round house, roofed over with reeds and palm leaves, for the accommodation of the crew. A huge pile occupies the main deck, leaving a narrow passage or gangway on either side, for the polemen and rowers. Over it are spread the skins of wild animals lately killed, now utilized as tarpaulings, to give protection to a variety of effects—in short, the general cargo. Amidships, on each raft, is a little platform of clay, raised some eight or ten inches above the timber's level. That is the hearth, intended for culinary purposes. In fine, upon the extreme stern, abaft the cabin of bamboos and canvas, a long broad-bladed oar, balanced on a pivot, is to do the rudder-work.

At length everything being in readiness for embarking, it was begun without further delay. Nor was there any in the carrying it out; for, as with the camp in the kloof, all were now eager to move away from this one. True, the place had been of some service to them; nevertheless was it fraught with most unpleasant memories. It was

there the tsetse first assailed their stock to its final and total destruction, not only beggaring them, but putting their lives in peril. So, almost as hurriedly as the inhabitants of a burning house flee from the fire, did they make for the rafts when these were ready to receive them.

The embarkation was accomplished in good order, and without accident. The cables, which were the old trek-touws of the abandoned waggons, being hauled in, and the huge structures, one after another, shoved out to mid-stream, they went gliding gently down.

But they were not the only craft to take departure from that landing-place; a score of others accompanying them, of a quaintly curious kind—being *water-horses*. Each consisted of a single trunk of koker-boom, with a peg of about fifteen inches in length fastened firmly to it, and standing upright near the fore. Lying flat along the log, face downwards, rode a naked native—Caffre or Hottentot—with one hand holding the peg, the other acting partly as an outrigger for balance, and

partly for propulsion. The legs, too, astraddle, and trailing in the water behind, helped the onward movement, as in swimming; so that the water-horses could be put to a speed far beyond that of the cumbrous rafts. Around these their riders darted in high glee, laughing, shouting, and splashing one another, as a flock of ducks fresh entered upon a pond.

The purpose of this aquatic cavalry was twofold; in part meant as a ready means of communication with the banks, and partly to avoid overcrowding the rafts. Moreover, many of the natives, used to such navigation, rather liked it; especially that now, under a broiling sun, it enabled them to dip their bodies at will, and keep them comfortably cool.*

* The "water-horse," as described, is often brought into requisition by the Caffres and other South African natives. They are found of great service in the crossing of wide rivers, especially when cattle and sheep have to be got over. Then the water-horsemen guide the animals, and swimming alongside assist the weaker ones and young calves.

Thus joyously the rafters began their voyage, at its outset to be treated to a laughable spectacle, as when crossing in flight from the tsetse. Though they had lost all their quadrupeds, there was still a creature with them of the animal kind — if a monkey may be so classed. It was the pet of Katharine Rynwald, but also favoured the Hottentot guide, Smutz, who, for its young mistress's sake, had been accustomed to show it kindness. As the odd flotilla moved off, Smutz bestrode one of the water-horses, and shooting past the foremost raft, on which sate the young girl with the monkey in her lap, the latter made a long outward leap, alighting upon his back; then fixing itself firm and square on his shoulders, there squatted composedly. The two facing in the same direction, with the round, bullet-like cranium of the Hottentot, surmounted by that of the monkey, it was as if some water Cerberus, or double-headed hydra, were conducting the squadron down stream.

But the incident was too comical to be looked

upon as an evil omen; instead, it elicited peals of laughter, with applauding shouts; all inclined to regard it as the forecast of a prosperous voyage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RIVER RUN OUT.

THE stream on which the Vee-Boers had embarked was unknown to all of them. Even their guide was unacquainted with it, though he had once accompanied a party of English hunters to a point farther north than where they now where. By its general direction it should run into the Limpopo, which river they had crossed some days before, on their trek northward. But where it joined the latter, and how far below, as also the character of the stream itself, were questions undetermined.

Nor knew they much more of the Limpopo. Van Dorn had been on it farther down, at the place where Smutz and the hunting party passed over; but neither he nor the Hottentot had followed its

course for any great distance. They were acquainted with but ten or fifteen miles of its course, beyond which all was *terra incognita* to them, or, as the baas in his Dutch vernacular expressed it, "verder onbekend."

Thus they had entered on a voyage, whose termination hinged on many uncertainties, and might be prolonged by many delays, to say nought of the dangers.

For the first day, however, all went well. The buoyant koker-booms acted admirably, keeping the decks, with all lading on them, high and dry. The current, too, while smooth, was sufficiently rapid to give them good way, without requiring the use of either pole or paddle. All that needed doing was to keep in mid-stream, on account of its narrowness, and that was of easy accomplishment with the powerful stern oars working on their pivots. Large as were the rafts, and heavily laden, so light were their timbers, that when swirl or side current threatened to bring them against the bank, the weakest man on board might

be safely entrusted with the steering. Craft of no kind could have been more obedient to the rudder, a matter of much pride and boast to the Macobas, who had the credit of their construction.

But, indeed, all the people were in the most exuberant of spirits. Moving on without any physical exertion—a smooth gliding motion, as on skates or in a sleigh—was of itself a pleasure, which the continuous changing of the scenery, with many sights new to them, intensified to very delight. It was as though they were out on a holiday excursion, or yachting trip, and for the time they thought not of dangers that might be before them, while alike oblivious of the perils they had late passed through.

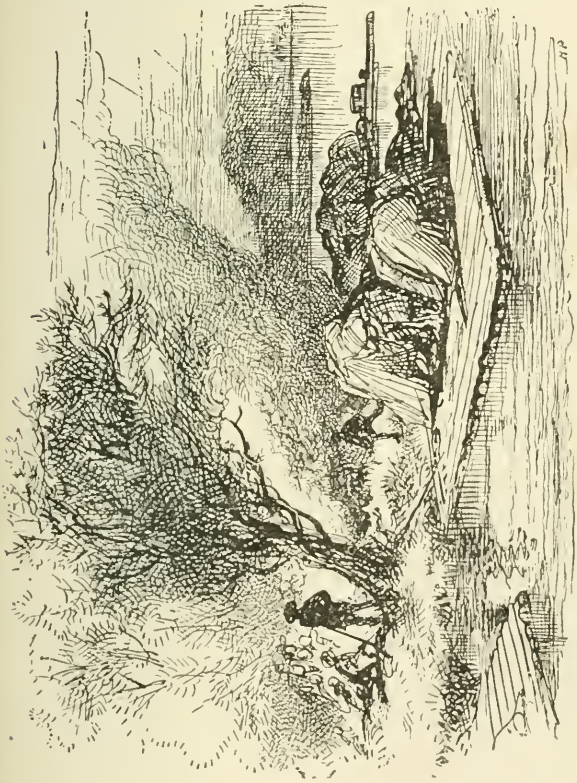
The enjoyment was general throughout all the day; the water-cavalry skirmishing around with much shouting and laughter. There was racing also, with bets made by the young Boers, each laying on his favourite.

In these aquatic contests the Caffres were mostly victorious, though Smutz ably upheld the honour

of the Hottentot race. The Macobas took no part in them, being on board the rafts, and occupied with their navigation.

As evening approached the "horse play" came to an end, for now there was work to be done: the rafts to be brought up to the bank, and made fast to moorings. To keep drifting on in the dark would be madness itself, as who could tell what was below? There might be rapids, or worse danger still—a waterfall. Jan Van Dorn was too cautious to run any such risk; so, as the twilight began to fling its purple mantle over stream and bordering woodlands, he called out the command to draw in, pointing to the spot that appeared best for a landing-place. This was in a bend where the current was sluggish, and the banks of slight elevation; for to beach such unwieldy craft in a swift-running stream is not only a difficulty but a danger. In the present case it was accomplished without accident; and the three soon lay alongside the bank, each cabled to a tree, with a gangway plank run out, over which all swarmed ashore,

women, children, and men. Water-travelling was a novelty to them ; and, though not yet irksome,



The three rafts soon lay alongside the bank.

the return to land was welcome by way of relaxation.

Supper was eaten on shore, though not there cooked, as the culinary arrangement on the rafts was of a superior order, better than any improvised affair of the gipsy kind. But what mattered it where the repast was prepared, so long as it was enjoyable, and enjoyed? which it was by our voyagers, one and all of them. For one and all were now hungry, having that day eaten the morgen-maal at a much earlier hour than usual. It was the last cooked in the ant-hill kitchen range; since when long time had passed, and with the fresh, breezy air of the river their appetites were sharpened to keenness.

Soon as the meal was over all retired to rest, some on board, others preferring to seek repose on shore, under the trees. It was warm enough anywhere, and more than enough, the heat not only being a discomfort of itself, but subjecting them to torture from mosquitoes.

These troublesome insects were in swarms—myriads—and made it all but a sleepless night to many. Even the Caffres, notwithstanding their

greased and ochre-coated skins, suffered the same, every now and then one or other taking a plunge into the river by way of soothing the irritation.

Joyously all hailed the return of daylight, which chased the persecutors away. And they were merry again over the morgen-maal, which they ate before leaving the landing-place. Nor was their hilarity less, after they had parted from moorings, and were once more in mid-stream, moving onwards. The delight of yesterday's downward glide, with its many pleasant incidents, led them to anticipate the same all along.

A disappointment it proved, as with most other matters of too sanguine expectation. For a few miles farther the current carried them smoothly as on the day before, and they made good way. But then things began to change, the stream becoming wider with a slower flow. This, they could see, was constantly decreasing, and at length ended in complete stagnation, as though the water were dammed up below.

Now, for the first time, had they to take to oars

and poling, the poles serving best in such shallow water. For they found it to be less than a fathom's depth, and still getting shallower as they pushed onward. But they had not much farther onward to go, nor could they. Another mile or so and the rafts, all three, became grounded. Just what Jan Van Dorn had been for some time apprehending—*the river was run out!*

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONGREGATION OF CROCODILES.

YES ; the river had run out, or, to speak more correctly, run in, underground. Its channel was there extending on ahead of them, a belt of silver-white sand, hollow in the centre, and with a bordering of brown, withered reeds. But no water in it ; not a drop, nor the sign of such, far as they could see, though commanding a view of it to more than a mile's distance. For they were looking down an Omaramba, a river's bed, in which water flows only in the season of inundation, at other times sinking into the earth, to filter away underneath. To the Vee-Boers the thing was neither strange nor new. In their migrations they had met the like before, and ofttimes ; for a stream periodically dried up is no rare phenomenon in Southern Africa,

nor indeed in other parts of the world. The same occurs in Asia, notably in Australia, as also in both divisions of the American continent. Nor is it unknown in the eastern countries of Europe, by the Black and Caspian Seas.

To our voyagers, then, it was less a surprise than vexation—indeed, bitter disappointment. All the time spent in the construction of the rafts, all their labour lost, to say nought of the helpless, hopeless situation they were now placed in!

But was it so helpless or hopeless? That remained to be seen; fortunately so, else they might have despaired indeed. They did not yet, nor could they, till the question had answer,—

"How far does the dried-up channel extend?"

To determine this was, of course, the next step, with little else thought of, till it was determined. An exploring party, with Smutz to conduct it, was at once landed from the rafts, and set off down the sandy strip. Going in all haste they were soon lost to view among the reeds and bushes at its lower end. Then their reappearance was looked for with

eagerness, gradually becoming anxiety as time passed. For the longer they were out of sight, the greater should be the distance to running water again, if such were to be found at all.

They were gone above two hours, which looked bad. But on return, as they drew near, an expression was visible on their faces, which betokened the contrary. The report they brought was that the stream, with abundance of water, issued forth again about five miles below.

This was as favourable as Jan Van Dorn had expected, and, in concert with the other baases, he had conceived a plan, now to be acted on. The rafts were to be taken apart, and, with their lading, transported overland piecemeal. Their lading had been already put ashore, as river, or no river, they could be of no further service there. But they would be below, as much as ever, and it was only a question of portage.

The work was at once set about, the huge structures dismembered, beam by beam, and dragged out on the dry strand. Then a stream of carriers

commenced moving along the track where water had once streamed, each with a koker-boom log on his shoulders, that seemed as though it would crush him under its weight. With their naked, bronzed bodies, they looked like so many Atlases bearing worlds, though, in reality, their loads were of the lightest.

Down the omaramba went they, and up again, to and fro, till the last beam had been transported from water to water, with oars, poles, ropes, and all the other paraphernalia, the cargoes being conveyed in like manner. It took time though; all the remainder of that day, and the forenoon of the following, while another day and a half were consumed in the reconstruction of the rafts. An easy task it was, compared with the original building of them, the place of everything being now known, deck-timbers with their attachments, steering gear, the fixing of the cabins and sheds, even to the stowage of the goods and chattels.

On the morning of the fourth day, all was ready for re-embarking, which commenced as soon as

breakfast had been eaten. Then off again started the flotilla, water-horses, and everything as before. But not as before carried along by the current, since there was none.

Nor in its absence did the rafters see anything amiss. The place of their re-embarkation was at the inner and upper end of a narrow leit, which widened abruptly below. Once down there, they would find the stream flowing, and get into its current. So supposed they, while pulling and poling on.

Soon, however, to be undeceived, and sadly. After passing the point where the leit terminated, they still found no flow; instead, the water stagnant as in a tan-pit. It stretched before them in a sheet of smooth, unrippled surface, nearly a mile in length, with a width of two or three hundred yards, again narrowing at the lower end, where it entered among trees. On each side it was bordered by a ribbon of sandy beach, which would have been white, but for an array of dark forms that lay thickly over it, giving it a mottled or

striated appearance. The sun had not yet dissipated the film which hung over the water, and, seen through this, they might have been mistaken for trunks of trees, stranded when the stream was in flood.

But the Vee-Boers knew better; knew them to be living creatures—the most repulsive of all in the world of animated nature—for they were crocodiles. Of different sizes were they: from ten or twelve feet in length to twice as long; the larger ones having bodies thick as an ordinary barrel; their bulk, too, exaggerated by the magnifying effect of the mist.

There would have been nothing in that, nor their presence there, to cause surprise, but for their numbers. All along the stream, crocodiles had been observed at intervals, basking on the banks, sometimes three or four together. But here were so many hundreds, the strip of beach on both shores literally black with them. They were in all attitudes, some lying flat and at full stretch, others with heads erect and jaws wide apart; still others holding the tail high in air with a turn back

towards the body, or laid in crescent curve along the surface of the sand. But all motionless, the only movement observable among them being made by birds of the insect-eating species, a number of which sate perched on their shoulders, every now and then flittering off to catch flies that swarmed around the reptiles, alighting on their foul, ill-odoured skins.

Although an astounding and fear-inspiring spectacle, they upon the rafts were, in a manner, prepared for it. On the nights preceding they had heard loud noises below, as the bellowing of a hundred bulls, knowing them to be caused by crocodiles, and only wondering that there were so many in one place. Now seeing the reptiles themselves their wonder was undiminished, with no clearer comprehension of why they were thus congregated.

Nor learnt they the reason till later on, no time being then allowed them to think of it; for scarce had the rafts emerged from the narrow leit when the birds, sighting them, rose up into the air, uttering shrill cries of alarm.

On the saurians the effect was instantaneous. Hitherto motionless, and many of them asleep, all became at once active; their activity displayed by a quick uprising on their short, thick legs, and a hurried crawl for the water. It was their place of safety, as instinct admonished them, and the rafters supposed they were but retreating from an enemy yet unknown to them. Soon to be undeceived, and find it was no retreat, but an intended attack, themselves the object of it! For although the crocodiles on plunging in, went under, and were for a time out of sight, they came to the surface again, now nearer the rafts, a line on either side of them. In threatening attitude too, heads raised on high, jaws opening and closing with a snap, grunting and roaring, while, with their powerful muscular tails in violent vibration, they whipped the water into foam.

There was consternation, with quick scampering among the riders of the water-horses, who had been gaily skirmishing about, as was usual with them at the start off. Never did sailors bathing beside a becalmed ship make quicker on board at the cry

"Shark!" than made they to get upon the rafts.

With loud cries of alarm, one and all together darted towards these, and swarmed up, leaving the koker-logs to bob about below, or drift away wherever the surge might carry them. Nor were the rafters themselves without fear, but rushed affrightedly about, the women and children shrieking in chorus. Even some of the men felt dismay at the fierce bearing of the crocodiles, an incident altogether unexpected and new to them. Its very novelty made it the more alarming, from its cause being a mystery. But there was no time to speculate upon causes; the reptiles were still advancing in menace, and steps needed taking to repel them.

Fire was at once opened on them, broadsides from both beams, and the firing kept up, hot and fast as the guns could be loaded again. Shot after shot, and volley after volley was poured upon them, till the rafts became shrouded in smoke, and the water around red with the blood of the dead and wounded reptiles, that for a time seemed insensible

to fear. But at length it got the better of them; and, seeing nigh a dozen of their number writhing in death throes, at last all turned tail, going down to the bottom and staying there.

Continuing to ply poles and oars, the rafters reached the lower end of the water sheet without encountering another crocodile, or even seeing one. There to get explanation of what had so puzzled them, by *finding the river again run out!*

CHAPTER XX.

THE KARL-KOP.

SO was it; the water, once more gone underground, sank into the sand, just as above. Even worse than above, as regarded navigation, for an exploring party sent forward, returned to report the channel dry to a distance of at least ten miles, twice as far as before.

This made still more intelligible the great congregation of crocodiles. They were the denizens of nigh twenty miles of the stream's length, driven, by a long-continued drought, into such close companionship. Crowded together, as frogs in a pond, they had devoured every fish, every living thing dammed up along with them in the sheet of stagnant water, and were famishing. Hence their hostility

and fearlessness of man, due as much to hunger, as to any natural ferocity.

But the Vee-Boers thought no more about them now. Enough was there to occupy their minds in this second obstruction that had arisen, and which vexed them more than the first, their leader far more—to him a very chagrin—as he reflected on his want of forethought. He should not have been satisfied with such a short, careless reconnaissance, but examined the omaramba to the farthest end, wherever that might be. Resolved to act with more prudence in this second exploration, he had taken charge of it himself, nor turned back, till assured of the stream's re-issue and onward flow without any other interruption.

This assurance had been obtained by discovering that the sandy tract they were traversing was but a belt of some ten or twelve leagues in breadth, beyond which the nature of the country was different, the surface-soil being firm and clayey. Rivers running over a bed of clay do not go underground, and there was no fear of a third obstruction,

at least of that special kind. These facts were not all ascertained in a few hours, nor yet in a single day. Two, and part of a third, were spent in the exploration.

While it was in progress, those left behind had remained inactive, as there was nothing for them to do. Should there be no more stream, there could be no further navigation, and again taking the rafts to pieces would be so much labour lost. In this uncertainty, even their lading was left undisturbed; only such chattels carried on shore as were needed for a camp of temporary occupation. Nor did any of the people, white or coloured, elect to sleep on land, having by this time discovered the water to be a better place. Upon it they were less exposed to the torture of mosquitoes, to avoid which, the rafts were each night drawn out to some distance from the beach, and there brought to anchor. So shoal was it all round, they had no difficulty in communicating with the shore whenever desirable.

It was an interval of great anxiety, full of

doubts and apprehensions. Not all dulness, however, as the monotony of their life was now and then varied by episodes of a curious kind—scenes and incidents of nature, such as may be witnessed only in her wild, untrodden domain. One which occurred on the evening after their arrival was of this character—indeed, so strange as to test the reader's credulity. Yet is it here chronicled as a fact, on the authority of trustworthy witnesses, the adventurers themselves.

It had got to be near sunset; the people all on shore, and seated at the nacht-maal, when a swishing and crackling among the trees close by, admonished them of some large quadruped making its way towards the water. It might be buffalo, rhinoceros, or hippopotamus; but, judging from the volume of sound, more likely an elephant. And an elephant it was, as was soon seen; one of the largest size, and a Karl-kop, in other words, a tuskless bull. Alone was he, which proclaimed him an outcast from elephantine society—an Ishmaelite in his own land.

All this indicated danger, as they watching him well knew. For the solitary male elephant is vicious beyond conception, being absolutely insane, or *must*, as it is termed in India.

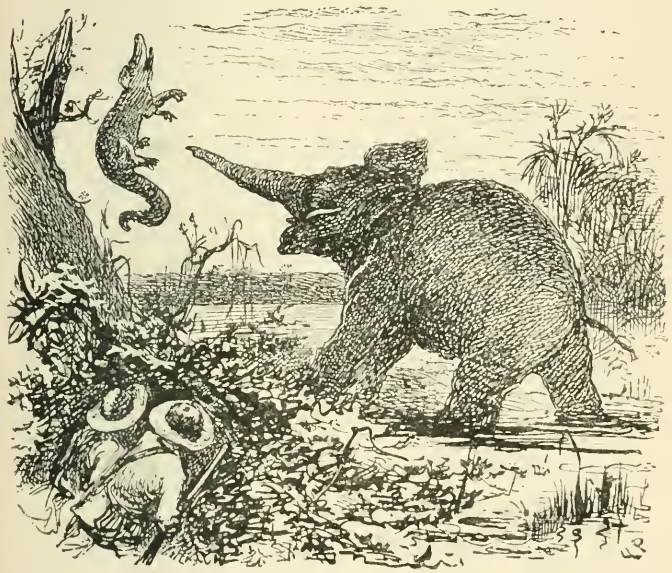
He was approaching the water, presumably to quench his thirst, and in a few more strides stood upon its edge, not fifty yards from the spot where the people were sitting, luckily behind some bushes that screened them from his sight. They were not all seated now, however, as several of the young Boers had sprung upon their feet, and were hastening to get hold of their guns. Some already had them in hand, but delayed opening fire, a word from baas Rynwald restraining them. A caution it was in view of the risk to be run. For, should they fail to kill the bull at once, and only wound and infuriate him, then would they all be at his mercy. Besides, he was only a Karl-kop, an aged one, and not worth powder and ball. These admonitions were spoken in a whisper, nor was there any noise made otherwise, lest the elephant should hear and strike off in retreat, or, what was

just as likely, charge into their midst. But the caution was acted upon, and not a shot fired; instead, silence preserved by one and all, so profound that the rustling of a leaf might have been heard from afar. There was not a breath of air stirring at the time, and the water was still and smooth as a mirror.

By this the old bull had entered it, and they now saw that something besides thirst had brought him thither. He drank, too, till satisfied, his first performance. After which, wading a stride or two farther in, he proceeded to give himself a shower-bath, drawing the water into his trunk, and blowing it out again upwards, so that it fell over his back in spray as from a whale-spout. For some five minutes had he been thus sprinkling himself, when he was seen all at once to start, pluck his proboscis out of the water, and, uttering a cry as of rage and pain, wheel back towards the beach.

What the cause of this unexpected demonstration was, the spectators could not tell. Amid the eddies he had raised, with floating froth and

bubbles, nothing was observable to explain it. And the Karl-kop himself seemed equally ignorant



It was tossed up into a tree.

of it, for, on reaching dry land, he faced round again, and stood regarding the spot he had so abruptly abandoned with a puzzled, mystified air.

Only for a few seconds stood he thus, when his little eyes began to sparkle with a peculiar intelligence, his ears giving indication of the same by a satisfied flap or two, as much as to say, "Now I know what did it." Then, as if determined to have his bath out, he strode back into the water, till nearly knee-deep, and once more plunged his proboscis underneath. But his design was all different, as the spectators were soon made aware by seeing a ripple on the surface of the water, a moving furrow as from the dorsal fin of a shark, but which they knew to be caused by a crocodile. And a crocodile it was; one of small size, not over six or seven feet in length. But surely the same that had made a snap at the elephant's trunk, inflicting a wound which, though slight, was enough to account for that angry scream, with the action accompanying.

Many tales have been told of the sagacity of elephants, and many instances recorded, truthful too. But, perhaps, never one affording better proof of it, and certainly none stranger, than that the

Vee-Boers were witnesses of there and then. Standing still, with trunk partly submerged, the great pachyderm kept the long, flexible feeler in constant, but gentle oscillation, playing its tip horizontally from side to side, as an angler his fly, or mock-minnow.

The bait took almost instantly. Scarce a minute had elapsed, ere the crocodile, drawing close up, under the surface, cautiously, made a second attempt to seize it. This time to get seized itself, and jerked out of the water, as if it had been but a sprat. Then the elephant again facing shoreward, strode out, still holding it in his trunk with octopus-like clasp, more than one lap of the gristly tube being around it. High in air was the reptile raised, to be hoisted yet higher, as soon as the Karl-kop set foot on land.

For it was tossed up into a tree, and fell in a fork between two branches, elastic boughs, that, closing upon it, held it as in a vice, despite all its writhings and wrigglings!

The spectators affirm that the elephant flung it

into that particular crotch, with a foreknowledge of the result, though I myself rather think that the deposition was a thing of chance.

From that high eminence the ugly creature never came down, though a bullet, afterwards sent into it in mercy, brought its struggles to an end.

But before this, the Karl-kop had been permitted so depart in peace, without a shot fired at him, young Boers and all now desirous that he should go unscathed. Recalling the scare which the crocodiles had given them, they looked upon him in the light of an ally and avenger. So that without seeing, or having any suspicion of the danger so near him, he went away back upon the same spoor, to continue his lonely life and wanderings.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFLOAT ON THE LIMPOPO.

A BROAD river coursing eastward for the Indian Ocean, nearly in the latitude of the Tropic of Capricorn. Drifting down it is a large raft, with many people upon it, and that which, seen from a distance, might be taken for three trek-waggons. On nearer view, however, these are discovered to be but waggon-tilts, supported on upright posts instead of wheels. Needless to say, they are the same which have been all along sheltering our party of migrating Boers, and the river the Limpopo; while the large raft is a composite structure of the three small ones lashed and braced together, with some additional timbers to give it greater size and strength. The original beams of koker-boom had been carried across the

second portage, put together as before, and brought on down the branch stream, without encountering any other interruption. On reaching its mouth, however, it was deemed better to continue the voyage with the three united in one, and the union has been made. In the new arrangement the waggon-tilts still hold position on the quarter-deck, side by side and parallel to one another; while only one of the steering-oars—the central one—is retained. The sheds are also re-erected on the fore-deck, with the cargo collected into one pile, and instead of three fire-hearths, a single one now serves for all. With the thermometer often at 100° in the shade it is not there for warmth, but culinary needs.

There are still a half-score of the water-horses attached, but now in tow astern, and with no one bestriding them. Nor have they been much ridden since that great crocodile scare; all along the branch stream, thence downward, the reptiles being in such numbers, and so fiercely disposed, as to make it unsafe. The horses, however, have been

retained to meet certain emergencies, as when quick communication with the banks may be necessary or desirable. But there is now another tender attached, of quite a different kind ; a canoe full twenty feet in length, with a beam's breadth of about five, capable of holding a crew of eight or ten. It is of the "dug-out" pattern, hollowed from a single trunk, the handicraft of the Macobas.

All this occupied time, more than a fortnight having been spent in the work of remodelling and reconstruction, the scene of operations being inside the embouchure of the tributary. During that period the people were, of course, compelled to live on land, and there passing sleepless nights, through the torment of mosquitoes, they are glad to get out upon the bosom of the broad river, where but few of these persecutors will follow them.*

As the re-embarkation has been just effected, they are as yet uncertain how the new craft will

* If a wide river, mosquitoes are rarely found far from the bank. Along the water's edge is their favourite haunt, especially where wooded.

behave. But with the buoyant koker-booms holding it high in the water, its gives promise of good "floating" qualities, which has put all on board into the best of spirits. Besides, they are again experiencing that exquisite sense of pleasure derived from motion without toil, with the added delight of ever-changing scenes. The tract of country they are now traversing is different from any they have yet passed over; a vast level plain, with no mountain, not even a hill, visible on either side; treeless to a far distance, the only vegetation near being tall grass and reeds, with here and there on the higher stretches of bank a thin scattering of bushes, chiefly acacias. At a different period of the year, most of the land in sight would be under water—inundated. Even now portions of it are marsh, though it is the season of drought, and the river at its lowest. Yet is there no lack of animal life, birds especially abounding; birds of largest size and endless variety of species. Standing balanced on one leg, or leisurely winging through the air, can be seen the "Wattled" and "Blue"

cranes ; while on some bit of smooth sand beach may be witnessed that curious spectacle, "Caffre" cranes,* dancing a quadrille, with wings extended and waving about, as the gauzy skirts of ladies in a ball-room. Not far off, but solitary, is the great "Goliath heron," as also the white egret, two kinds of flamingoes, and storks of several species ; among these the gigantic "Adjutant,"† whose beak, like a pick-axe when pointed upward with neck at full stretch, will reach to the height of a man's head. Affrighted from their watery rest, flocks of wild

* The "Wattled" crane (*Grus carunculata*). The "Blue" crane of the South African colonists is that better known to naturalists as the Stanley crane (*Anthropoides Stanleyanus*). The "Caffre" crane is the beautiful species with coronetted head (*Balearica Regulorum*), called also "Crowned" crane, and sometimes "Balearic" from its being an inhabitant of the Balearic Isles.

† The Adjutant, or, as more commonly called, "Adjutant bird" (*Ciconia Argali*), belongs to the family of storks, of which South Africa possesses no less than seven distinct species. The species of *Ardeinæ*, or Herons, are there even much more numerous, there being fifteen of them including true herons, egrets, and bitterns.

geese and ducks fly to and fro ; while the ostriches and great "Kori" bustards go stalking over the plain, or, approaching the river's bank, stand gazing at the raft, half in wonder, half alarmed. High in the heaven's above are vultures of various kinds ; also eagles, kites, and others of the falcon tribe, each soaring in its own curve, with eyes on the *qui vive* for quarry below.

Nor are quadrupeds scarce; instead plenteous, both in number and species. Here and there a hippopotamus appears swimming about in the river, or but for a moment showing its clumsy head, with thick truncated muzzle above the surface as it rises to breathe ; then going under again to leave a large eddy with floating froth and bubbles. Now and then a rhinoceros comes crashing through the reeds by the river's edge on its way to drink, while troops of quaggas, zebras, and antelopes, the last varied in size and sort, roam over the veldt beyond.

But the spectacle most interesting of all was one afforded by the largest of quadrupeds—the elephant itself; a sight so rare as to well deserve being

called wonderful; and so the old jäger, Jan Van Dorn, pronounced it—even he never having witnessed the like before.

During the time they were engaged in raft-building, they had observed elephants on the opposite side of the great river; not a single herd, but straggling bands all moving in the same direction —downward. Day after day they had noticed this stream of the great pachyderms, supposing them to be the same animals that had returned up in the night, and were thus journeying to and fro for food, or water.

Now they had evidence to the contrary, and in less than an hour after embarking. As they passed down, with eyes scanning the plain on both sides of the river, they arrived opposite a wide expanse of wet marsh, or savanna, extending away from the right bank. On this was a herd of elephants, a multitude so vast as to seem all of the elephant kind inhabiting South Africa. The ground was thick covered and black with them for miles upon miles, the whole drove certainly numbering not

less than a thousand head! They were up to their bellies browsing on a green sedge — that grew luxuriantly in the wet marshy soil—no doubt the cause of their being so congregated.

To the young Boers it was a sight not less tantalizing than strange, and their elders had a difficulty in restraining them. One and all were for bringing the raft in to the bank, landing, and making slaughter among the pachyderms. But the old jäger in command would not listen to this; knowing as he did, that the first shot fired would send the herd helter-skelter, even should they stand to receive a first shot.

Besides, he urged another and more convincing objection. To stalk such game on that ground, bare of trees and other protecting cover, would be attended with the greatest danger. Instead of retreating, just as likely might they charge upon the stalkers, and put them to flight, with scarce a chance of escape.

In fine, the elephants were let alone, though not without sore reluctance on the part of the young

hunters. Even the baases disliked it; for it seemed almost as the leaving behind some thousands of pounds of ivory, with as many hundreds of pounds sterling. But it had to be done; the uncertainty, with peril attendant, determining the sacrifice.

And there was still another factor which just then interfered. The raft, hitherto gliding smoothly on at a fair rate of speed, had been found to be gradually slowing, and was now scarce making way at all. The cause was clear enough. Up to this point, or rather *down* to it, they had been carried along on the current of the inflowing stream, which here came to an end amid the more sluggish waters of the great river.

By Jan Van Dorn this new and unexpected impediment was looked upon with something more than vexation—indeed alarm—the wiser ones sharing it. Before them were long leagues of river navigation; how many they could not tell, or what time it might take to reach the sea. But they knew there was also a rainy season before them, during which the low-lying coast-land becomes a hotbed

of malarial fever, almost always fatal to white men. No wonder then at their dreading delay.

It seemed a poor alternative, taking to oars; but they had hopes of again getting into a current farther down, and so took to them. Poling they did not think of now; as, despite the river being at its lowest, it was too deep for that. But there were oars in plenty, with men to man them; so out went they, to be worked with a will.

Notwithstanding, their progress was unsatisfactory, the cumbrous structure refusing to move at a speed of much more than a mile to the hour. And as still further discouragement a long reach of the river—leagues of it—stretched before them, straight as a canal, and to all appearance as stagnant. But this, at first dispiriting, after a little became suggestive. If in directness of course the stream resembled a canal, either of its banks—smooth, firm, and level as they were—might be likened to a tow-path.

Why should they not try towing? Just the idea that occurred to baas Van Dorn; to be acted

upon without an instant's delay. Quick as it could be done, the old waggon trek-trouws were spliced together, one end made fast to the raft, and the other carried ashore, with a score of Hottentots and Caffres to do the towing. Which commenced amid a chorus of encouraging cries; and soon the huge, heavy craft, with constantly increasing speed, was "walking the water like a thing of life."

CHAPTER XXII.

LEGS EASILY BROKEN.

THE towers had advanced but a very short way when an incident arose, illustrating a strange ornithological fact—indeed, so strange as to seem apocryphal. While pulling onward with shouts and laughter, they saw before them two large birds, which all knew to be *Slangvreters*,*—easily recognizable as such by their slender bodies, thick aquiline beaks, and long stilt-like legs. But still more, by the spike of plumelets growing out of their crowns with a backward slant; which, from a

* The Secretary Bird (*Serpentarius reptilivorus*) called *Slangvreter* (snake-eater) by the Boers. It is held in high esteem by the South African colonists, on account of its services as a destroyer of reptiles; and there is even a heavy fine, imposed by law, for killing one of these birds.

fancied resemblance to the old-fashioned quill-pen stuck behind the ear of clerk or scrivener, has earned for them the more common title of "Secretary birds." When first observed, they were out on the open veldt serpent-hunting. One had even seized a large green snake, borne it aloft into the air, and was in the act of dashing it to the ground, where the other, with outstretched neck and vibrating wings, was waiting to pounce upon it. They were but a little out of the way of the towers, who expected to see them drop the snake, and retreat further, or carry it away. They did drop the snake, but instead of making off, drew nearer with a rush, half running, half flying; nor stopped they till close up, and direct on the path the towing party must take. Not to remain at rest there, but with continued fluttering around a mimosa-bush that grew upon the bank — all the while screaming affrightedly.

There was no mystery about their behaviour, strange as it appeared. Its cause was declared by cries, a sort of guttural rattling, which came

responsive out of the mimosa, where a nest was now descried with young in it. It was an immense cluster of sticks loosely put together, through which the long legs of the two young secretaries—for there was but a pair—hung dangling down. By this the towers were beside it, and a scramble ensued to get hold of the chicks, the old birds having at length despairingly forsaken them, though still tarrying near. But the youngsters were not to be caught so easily. Nearly full-fledged and grown, before hand could be laid on either, they bolted out of the nest, and struck off in run over the veldt, flapping their wings to assist them. Half a dozen of the men followed, eagerly bent on capture. For the slangvreter is a favourite pet with the South African Dutch; often tamed and kept as a protector of the poultry-yard. But notwithstanding the swiftness of some of their pursuers, the young secretaries, running like ostriches, would doubtless have escaped, but for an accident depriving them of the use of their limbs. Traversing the line of their retreat was a fissure in

the ground, and into it both tumbled head foremost, from their eyes being all on the pursuers behind. It was a dry rain-gulch, so shallow, it seemed as though the birds might easily have got out again, and continued on. So could they, and would, had their legs but held good, which they did not. Instead the young secretaries lay struggling at the bottom of the gulch; and when taken up, it was found that one had both legs broken, the other a leg and a wing!

Their captors thought little of this, knowing it a thing of common occurrence, and that the legs of young slangvreters are so brittle as often to snap in twain—even from a fall on level ground, if the birds be alarmed, and started suddenly into a run.

The captives were taken on board the raft; but, as it was known that their broken limbs could not be set again, they were humanely killed, to save them from a lingering death. But compassion had to undergo a still greater trial, at sight and hearing of the parent birds, as they flew frantically around

the now untenanted nest, uttering shrill plaintive cries. But the Caffres and Hottentots, callous to pity, made light of their anguished demonstrations; and, hoisting the tow-rope over the mimosa-bush, once more bent themselves along it, and treked on, mirthful and boisterous as ever.

They had not proceeded much farther, however, before encountering another incident, of a less pleasant nature, as though meant to rebuke and punish them for their unfeeling behaviour. With the sun high up in a cloudless sky, the atmosphere had become hot as the inside of a glass-house; so sultry as soon to put an end to their merry caperings. Instead of jumping about, and playing tricks on one another, they were now contented to move soberly and slowly along—even letting the tow-rope drag the ground. The thick hawser of raw hide was no light weight in itself, to say nothing of the huge thing that needed pulling along.

Jan Van Dorn, with others upon the raft, began to chafe at the slow progress they were making;

the baas at length calling out to them to mend their pace. As he spoke commandingly, expecting obedience, what was his surprise to see them drop the tow-rope as if it had been a bar of red-hot iron, and at the same time recommence capering about! But their antics were now of a different kind, both legs and arms in violent agitation, as though one and all had become suddenly afflicted with the malady of St. Vitus! Their voices, moreover, had quite a different tone; no more in jest or laughter, but cries and exclamations betokening pain. So shouting, and wildly gesticulating, some ran out on the open veldt, others to and fro along the bank. But most of them made a rush down to the river, and plunging in, swam off for the raft. Not till they were close up to it, did the cause of their debandade become known to those on board; then by their seeing over the head of each swimmer a swarm of insects easily recognizable as bees. Each had his own escort of them; the bees infuriated, and spitefully buzzing, as at intervals they darted down to inflict their stings. All was

understood now. The trailing hawser had caught upon a hive, to make wholesale ruin of it; and the incensed insects were taking revenge for the destruction of their honeyed store.

As the swimmers came on, it was seen that the Caffres, protected by their thick lanigerous mops, suffered least; while the Hottentots, with scantier covering of wool, had to keep constantly ducking their heads under water.

All this was highly provocative of mirth to the people on the raft, and most of them were now in convulsions of laughter. But not long to continue it; scarce a minute more, till they had convulsions of another and very different kind. For soon as the retreating towers climbed upon deck, the bees, forsaking them, attacked every one indiscriminately — white, black, and yellow all the same. The shouts and gesticulations, heard and seen hitherto, were nothing to compare with the racket that arose now. Women shrieked as they rushed in under the canvas tilts, tugging their children after, all in wild hullabaloo; while the young Boers

leaped about, arms up and buffeting the air, as so many Don Quixotes fighting imaginary windmills. Even the trio of grave, phlegmatic baases were forced to take part in the grotesque saltatorial performance!

Nor was it so soon over, but kept up for nigh twenty minutes' time; till the last bee got killed, or driven from the raft. But before this could be done, scarce anybody escaped without a sting; some of the towers first attacked having eyes "bunged up," and features so swollen as to be well-nigh obliterated. Neither was this the worst, or at least the whole of it. For in addition to the physical pain, there was a mental one. They had heard of a species of bee, inhabiting that very part of Africa, whose sting is poisonous, resulting in certain death. No wonder at their apprehensions being keen, even to torture. Nor did they get over them, with full confidence restored, for days after; not till the swelling had gone down, and all suspicious symptoms disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HIPPOPOTAMUS HUNTING.

WHILE the battle with the bees was progressing upon the raft, the same enemy was being fought on the bank by the towers who had stayed there; seven or eight of whom could not swim. Some of these had leaped into the river, where they saw it was not of a depth to drown them, the rest running off over the veldt. Equally ludicrous was the behaviour of both parties. They in the water having waded in, deep as was safe, there stopped. But as the bees followed, and were still buzzing about their heads, they had to keep ducking under water, bobbing up and down, as boys in their first essays at diving. Those who remained on land rushed wildly hither and thither, at intervals bounding up like spring-

boks, all the while sawing the air with their arms to an accompaniment of dolorous cries. It was some time before the towing could be resumed, every one busy doing his best to allay the pain from stings received. But as the raft had now nigh come to a stop, the voice of the head baas was once more raised in command; the hawser fished up out of the water, and again taken ashore; then a detail of fresh hands following to man it, the towage was continued as before.

But the rope was no longer allowed to trail. Heavy though it was, and still hot the sun, care was taken to keep it clear of the ground, with a sharp look-out for bees' nests; several others that were encountered being given a wide berth.

Fortunately for all, this toilsome trek did not need to be of long duration. At the lower end of the straight reach there was a bend in the river, rounding which they once more caught the current in strength sufficient to carry the raft briskly along. So the towers were called back on board; the hawser drawn on deck, and stowed away in a

coil for future service of a similar kind, should it be required.

The rafters were just beginning to congratulate themselves on the smooth, easy gliding again, with a satisfactory rate of speed, when they observed that this last was gradually increasing. But not slowly; instead, with a rapidity to give them cause for apprehension. It was a change from one extreme to the other, a revulsion of feeling sudden as complete. But an hour before they had been chafing at still water; now did they as little like it running —their minds filled with a fear of rapids below.

Just such there proved to be; a chain of them, one succeeding another, for the next twenty leagues of the river's course. It was where the land surface sloped down from the high plateau of the interior to the low-lying belt of the coast. But luckily by a gentle incline; had there been any abrupt escarpment, a cataract in the stream would have been the consequence, and possibly the raft gone over it, so bringing the adventures of our Vee-Boers, with their lives, to a termination, there and then.

As it was, they encountered no waterfall, only rapids; which, by a dextrous use of the poles, with one or other of the Macobas all the time at the steering oar, they succeeded in safely running. It was often a close shave though, with wreckage imminent more than once. Once, indeed, the raft grounded upon a subaqueous reef, and threatened going to pieces. But what with the buoyant koker-booms, the reliable lashings of Baavian-touw, and the skill of the Lake Figam boatmen, it was got off again without serious damage.

Rejoiced were all when at length assured that the last of the turbulent rushes had been run, and they were once more in a tranquil current, with the assurance of its extending to a far distance beyond them. They had this confidence from the changed character of the stream, and the scenery on its banks. It now coursed through flat, alluvial land, on both sides wooded to the water's edge; the trees of great height, and broad-leaved, with that lush luxuriance of underwood only found in tropical forests.

Thenceforward it was all plain sailing, and easy; though the steerers had a hard enough task, and required to be continuously at it. For the stream was now winding, often nigh back upon itself like the letter S, and at times near to being as the figure 8. Here, again, it was too deep for polling, but neither were the oars resorted to. Without them the raft made way averaging a league to the hour, and with this all were contented. The Boers of South Africa, as their ancestors by the Zuyder Zee, take things easily. Besides, the rainy season would not set in for another month, and in less than half that time, barring accidents, they should reach the reported Portuguese settlement by the river's mouth. Thence, getting out to sea, they would escape the fever danger.

Thus reliant, they allowed the raft to glide on, giving it no aid of oars, save the steering one, at which the two Macobas took turn and turn about, having all the work to do. The rest of the people did little or nothing, though the young Boers were busy enough. But with sport, not work; their

activity consisting in a display of shooting skill. Large birds were all the time hovering overhead, or flying past—cranes, pelicans, flamingoes, vultures, and eagles—and to bring one of these down with a bullet was the feat on which bets were made.

Many so fell, and doubtless more would have fallen; but before they had been long thus engaged, an order was issued for them to desist. It came from Jan Van Dorn, who had just conceived a grand economic scheme, suggested by something he saw in the river. This was a hippopotamus, or rather several; for since leaving the foot of the rapids, numbers of these amphibia had been observed, some waddling about upon the banks, others swimming to and fro in the water, the cows with calves on their backs; still others at rest on the surface as if asleep, with white birds—a species of sea-gull—perched upon their shoulders. Even those moving about had each its quota of such perchers, now and then affording an amusing spectacle, as the unwieldy quadrupeds sank under

water, forcing the birds to take wing with an odd air of bewilderment. Not so different was the behaviour of the quadrupeds themselves, as they saw the raft bear down upon them, and go drifting by —a sight altogether new to them. They may have seen canoes, water-horses, and other contrivances of river navigation in use among the natives, but never a craft like that—never one of such monstrous dimensions. And a monster it must have appeared to them, as at intervals it belched forth flame and smoke, accompanied by the loud reports of the roers.

With heads raised on high, the hippopotami responded to all this in loud snorts, groans, and bellowing, more in astonishment than alarm. There was also a tone of defiance in it which gratified the ear of the old jäger, making known to him that he was in a river where these animals had rarely, if ever, been hunted. This meant money, should the opportunity be taken advantage of, and he was not the man to let such a chance slip. Hence his having ordered the young Boers to cease

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firing at the birds, the *zeekoes* * offering a mark better worth powder and ball. So, from that moment, not one was passed within shot-range but had a bullet lodged in its body, and a second if the first failed to kill it; sometimes a whole volley, when needed to make death sure. Rarely was there a call for such wholesale expenditure of ammunition. Most of them had slain zeekoes before, and knew the exact spot to aim at; that most vulnerable being midway between eye and ear. With marksmen skilled as they, misses were rare; and the crack of a gun might be taken as sounding the death-knell of a hippopotamus.

While engaged in this practice, they became witnesses of an odd spectacle afforded by an old bull, which had been fired at and hit just behind the ear, too far back to give him his death wound. It seemed but to drive him crazy; as he com-

* Zeekoe (Anglice, "sea-cow") is the name by which the hippopotamus is known to the Dutch colonists of South Africa. It is just as inappropriate as that of "river-horse" (hippopotamus).

menced spinning round and round on the water, as a sheep in a pasture field, attacked by the "turn giddies." But he was not permitted to make many gyrations, ere a volley from the raft brought his spin to an abrupt termination, along with his life.

Thus, day after day, was slaughter made among the zeekoes, as the rafters went on down the river. Not wanton slaughter; but in pursuance of that scheme of economy the head baas had got into his head, now known, and approved of by his associates. How could they help approval, as they looked on a pile of hippopotamus teeth that lay on the raft's deck, every hour growing bigger, each fresh pair added being as so much money put into their pockets?

All this was satisfactory enough, but nothing to what awaited them farther down. As they drew near the coast, they came upon an islet lying centrally in mid-stream, at a place where the river was more than a mile in width. They sighted it just before sunset; and, knowing the night would

be moonless and pitch dark, it was determined to bring-to at the islet, and remain by it till morning. So the raft's head was set for it, without much change of course, as they had been already bearing nearly straight down upon it. When near, they saw it was selvedged with tall reeds, of the kind called palmit, which, standing in the water, formed a belt all round it, interrupted only at the upper end, where an open list led into the firm dry land. It was a sort of natural canal, no doubt due to the water being there too deep for the palmits to get root. It was just wide enough to admit the raft; and without further ado this was run into it, and "docked."

By this it was too dark for them to make out what lay beyond the immediate proximity of their moorings, though the staging-plank was run out, and some landed to ramble about a bit. When morning came, it was seen that the islet had an area of some eight or ten acres, all grass-covered; and, strange to say, the grass all withered, though but a foot or two above the level of the river's

water. Its brown colour strikingly contrasted with the vivid green of the palmits forming its periphery; and suggested a gorgeous picture-frame, from which the work of the artist had been removed, leaving nought behind but the rough backing of boards. Neither tree nor bush grew upon it; their absence indicating that it was subject to annual submergence in the season of rain.

To all this, however, the rafters scarce gave a thought. Nor would they have bestowed a second glance on it, but for what they saw on the water outside; this, an array of zeekoes, in such numbers that the surface was literally flecked with them! They were all around the islet, and over the river, far as the verge of vision—certainly hundreds of them. The spectacle recalled the vast assemblage of elephants encountered higher up; only that the great band of pachyderms were but visitors to the place where they had been seen, while these of the water seemed either to be permanent residents around the islet, or made it a sort of rendezvous.

Here, then, was a grand opportunity for the Vee-Boers to complete the scheme already in progress; in short, almost a certainty of making their fortunes. Nor did they hesitate about the steps that should be taken to profit by it. Instead, it was at once resolved to remain upon the islet, till the ultimate moment when the rainy season might be expected to commence, or the last zeekoe in that quarter be killed.

With like promptness did they enter upon execution. Ere the setting of another sun, the three waggon tilts were again seen serving as tents, set up in the centre and highest part of the islet—with two hartebeest-houses, constructed of the palmit reeds beside them—while the naked-bodied burden-bearers streamed to and fro between raft and camp-ground, as the links of an endless chain.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TO SEA AND HOME.

LET the reader imagine a month to have elapsed since our migrant graziers—for the time turned hippopotamus hunters—pitched their camp on the river islet. They are still in occupation of it; and proof that they have chased the zeekoes to some purpose is seen all around. Under a capacious shed, some hundreds of the animals' teeth lie in heaps, as horns in a tannery, and beside them many bunches of *jamboks*, manufactured from the hides; while piles of *Zeekoe-speck*,* and bladders of fat rendered into lard, are heaped

* The thick layer of fat immediately under the skin of the hippopotamus is esteemed a delicacy by the Boers, who call it, when salted and cured, Zeekoe-speck, or bacon. The jelly made from the feet is also much prized, while the best kind of whips (jamboks) are those of hippopotamus hide. As is well known, the teeth furnish an ivory of the finest quality.

up everywhere. During all the month they have had a busy time of it; the young hunters killing hippopotami, while the Hottentots and Caffres did the skinning, whip-making, curing, and "trying out."

Tempted by a chase so profitable in results, and still yielding, they had lingered till the last moment it might be safe. Perhaps too long, was the apprehensive thought of Jan Van Dorn, as one morning he waked up to behold the sky overcast with inky clouds, at the same time hearing the rumble of distant thunder. It was the very morning they had fixed upon for breaking up camp, and moving everything on board the raft. But as yet nothing had been stirred; waggon-tilts, hartebeest houses, sheds—with all the paraphernalia—standing or piled up as ever.

Neither was hand laid upon them that day, nor on the five days following. For before breakfast could be eaten, the far-off thunder had come near, and was no longer heard in low muttering, but loud reverberation; peal succeeding peal, as if all heaven's artillery had opened fire over their heads.

Lightning flashed and forked athwart the clouded firmament, from which fell rain, not in drops, but sheets—a very swill of it.

Five days, and part of a sixth, did the downpour continue without intermission, save in the nights. But these being dark as Erebus, nothing could be done in the way of transferring effects to the raft; while during daylight so thick and blinding was the rain, that to keep under shelter was the only thing thought of.

On the morning of the seventh day, the sky cleared again, and there was a suspension of the storm. But Jan Van Dorn and Smutz knew it would be only temporary; since now, sure enough, the dreadful periodical rains had set in. So much the more reason for hastening departure from that perilous spot.

As yet, however, their only fear was the fatal malarious fever, likely to ensue. But ere twenty minutes more had passed, they were made aware of another danger hitherto unthought of. Preliminary to moving their *impedimenta* on board the

raft, the three baases had gone down to inspect it, with a view to the storage of the cargo, now so much augmented. Never was visit of inspection shorter, or more perfunctory, nor one with more abrupt ending. In fact they could not get upon the raft at all, as the inner end of the plank, that had rested on dry land, was now several yards out in the water—bobbing up and down like a float-stick. There was no obscurity about the cause. The river had risen several feet; and, as they stood regarding it, they could see it was still on the rise. In another hour or two—possibly less—the whole islet would be under water.

Whatever the reason for haste before, it was now more than doubled. And, needless to say, all possible haste was made; a scene of activity following, with hurrying to and fro. Down came the waggon covers—canvass, bamboos and all—to be rushed on board the raft, and there dropped without waiting to set them up again; goods and chattels, all the old effects with the new, getting transferred from camp to craft in like expeditious manner.

Everything was on board by noon; and, as luckily no rain fell during the rest of that day, they had all stowed snug before night, and were ready to resume navigation; their last spell of it on that bottom of koker-booms—so hoped they, and believed.

By earliest dawn of the next day the raft was cast loose from moorings, and rowed out into the river clear of the islet. Then went it floating down, though with deck nearer the water-line than ever before. But this, instead of troubling those on board, only gave them gratification; as might be gathered from the words of Jan Van Dorn, spoken after they had got well under way. Seated beside his two associates on sheaves of jamboks, all three pipe in mouth, and eyes bent on the heaps of ivory, zeekoe-speck, and lard, the head baas thus unburdened himself:—

"After all, brothers, it's not likely to turn out so bad for us. Look at these!" with a nod towards the varied spoils. "If we can only get them safe into the Durban market, they'll sell for enough to make good all our losses. Aye," he added, with a

knowing wink, and a circular flourish of his meerschaum, "with a trifle of profit besides; sufficient to give us all a fresh start, and a good one, once we've treked back to the Transvaal."

"Ya—ya!" was the laconic response of Blom and Rynwald; after which the three sate smoking on in silence; only now and then interchanging grunts of congratulation, as their eyes rested on the valuable commodities heaped up around them.

* * * * * *

It is pleasant having to record, that their hopeful anticipations were realized, and to the letter. On the third day after putting off from the islet, the raft was tossing about in tidal water, where the river's current met the inflowing surge of the sea. And here again the koker-booms behaved splendidly, bearing them well up and safe through the conflict of waters—at length to lie cabled to a staunchion on the wharf of the little seaport they had heard of, and which proved to be in existence.

Nor did fortune forsake them there. Instead, favoured them in their finding a vessel at anchor in

the port — a coast-trader bound down for Natal. Overjoyed was her skipper to take them on board; so many passengers, who could well pay the passage-money, to say nothing of the large amount of freight, giving him a full cargo. It was just as if they had chartered his vessel beforehand, and he had been awaiting them.

In fine, the wanderers by land and water got safe back to their point of departure in the Transvaal, richer than they had ever been before. Nor did they leave it again, having no longer cause for expatriation. For soon after their return, ensued that strife usually called the "Transvaal Rebellion," but by the Transvaalians themselves, the "War of Independence."

How they won it at Laing's Nek, and the Spitzkop, is well known; and among those who took part in that fierce, sanguinary fight, none bore them more gallantly, or did greater execution with their long guns, than the young Vee-Boers, whose travels and adventures are herein recorded.

THE END.

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